

THE "GRANDMOTHER OF MODERN EVANGELICALISM:"
THE LIFE AND WORK OF HENRIETTA MEARS

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ABSTRACT

This work focuses on Henrietta Mears, Director of Christian Education at First Presbyterian Church, Hollywood and her uniquely effective style of leadership development. Miss Mears helped develop over 400 full-time Christian workers who led millions of people to the Lord. Some of her notable protégés include Bill Bright, Billy Graham, Louis Evans Jr. and Richard Halverson.

The evidence for this study comes especially from two biographies of Miss Mears, one written by her assistant and one written by one of her former students. These books provide a unique perspective into the life of Miss Mears by those who knew her well. The thesis also draws from a variety of primary sources (including letters, handwritten notes, and photographs) and secondary sources.

The thesis seeks to elucidate Miss Mears' effective methodology for reproducing leaders. It begins by examining how Miss Mears was developed as a leader through the influence of her family, particularly her mother. It then proceeds to delineate the qualities which Miss Mears sought in her leaders and explicates her style of leadership development.

Introduction

"In a day of great need it is good to know of the testimony of Dr. Mears. It sings its way into many hearts and wins its way for Christ in many souls."

-Dr. R.I. Lindquist

Henrietta Mears has been called the "grandmother of modern Evangelicalism."¹ Not only did this remarkable woman lead thousands of individuals to the Lord, she also helped disciple and train some of major evangelical leaders of the twentieth century, including Bill Bright², Donn Moomaw, and Billy Graham.^{3,4} More than 400 of her students went into vocational Christian ministry and founded over 50 influential ministries.⁵ She built the Sunday School program at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood from 400 students to over 4000 students in two and a half years.⁶ Eventually, it became the largest Presbyterian Sunday School in the world with over 6000 members.⁷ Her teaching notes were posthumously published into a best-selling book that was distributed to new converts at Billy Graham crusades.⁸ She founded a publishing company committed to producing creative, age-graded, biblical Sunday School curriculum.⁹ She was influential in founding a conference center attended by tens of thousands of individuals every year. Dr. Harold John Ockenga, former president of

¹ Wendy Murray Zoba. "The Grandmother of Us All" (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 16 September 1996), 44.

² An estimated 3.4 billion people have heard the gospel through Bill and Vonette Bright's ministry, Campus Crusade for Christ. Marcus Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2006), 10.

³ Brotherton states that Billy Graham's message has reached billions of people over his five decades in ministry. Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 12.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Andrea V.B. Madden, "Henrietta Mears: Her Life and Influence." (Master's Thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1997), 1.

⁶ Henrietta Mears, "Leadership", date unknown.

⁷ Smith, Wilbur. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

⁸ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 38.

⁹ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 98.

Fuller Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, wrote to Miss

Mears:

What a work you have done! There is no your people's or Sunday school work done in this nation which is equal to that which you have done. When I think of the tens of thousands of people who have studied the Bible under your leadership, of the thousands of young people who have faced the claims of Christ and made a commitment to Him, and the scores of young men who have gone into the ministry and other your people into Christian service, I cannot but stand back in amazement. Your vision, your faith and your courage have been unequalled and only heaven can measure the fruit of your labors. Your vision has encompassed the world and God has privileged you to see the fruit of your labors.¹⁰

Who was this woman who so greatly influenced twentieth century Evangelicalism?¹¹ She was a near-sighted, single, female Chemistry teacher who began her ministry at age 38. However, she believed that she was called by God to develop leaders for Christian service, and devoted her life to this end. Despite her lack of formal religious training, the leaders that Henrietta influenced

are reproducing their kind wherever they go, for they learned from their beloved Teacher¹² that the true disciple trains other disciples to take his place. And this was her greatest dream—that her work in Hollywood might be but a spark to ignite brightly burning fires in every nation of earth so that, in coming generations, multitudes might hear the Galilean's call and be saved.¹³

This thesis will examine her own development as a Christian leader as well as her strategy for identifying and developing emerging Christian leaders.

¹⁰ Ockenga, Harold John. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹¹ Brotherton claims that "Her contribution to the international cause of the gospel ranks as one of the most important and influential of the 20th century."

¹² Henrietta was commonly referred to as "Teacher," an appellation that she treasured. Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 2.

¹³ Earl O. Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*. (Ventura: Regal Books, 1990), 224.

Section I

How Henrietta Mears Became a Leader

Chapter One

Family Legacy

Henrietta Mears trained up hundreds of effective Christian leaders who went on to train thousands more. How did a woman with no formal religious education learn such noteworthy methods for leadership training? Miss Mears believed in teaching leadership skills through example and experience, largely because that was the model for leadership development presented to her during her formative years. Henrietta was indelibly molded by the spiritual legacy of her parents and grandparents. One of her students expressed the impact of Henrietta's predecessors:

One thrilling thing to me about the life of Henrietta Mears is the great spiritual heritage she has received. The scope of her life has been tremendous; even more tremendous is the spiritual influence of her forebears, which can be traced back through at least five generations, and the spiritual "mantle" that has been handed down on the maternal side from one generation to the next. Truly, this is a witness to the Scriptural promise, "that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee..."¹⁴

The influence of Henrietta's Grandparents¹⁵

Henrietta's grandfather, William Wallace Everts,¹⁶ was the influential pastor of

¹⁴ Barbara Hudson Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1957), 82.

¹⁵ The testimonies of Henrietta's grandparents corroborate the importance of family legacy. Each of her grandparents recorded the lasting impact that their parents had on their life and faith, both through their example and their teaching. Mrs. Everts reports having "received many of her precepts from her mother, 'the invalid who always wore a white dress, sitting in her wheel chair with a radiant smile.'" (Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 83) Additionally, Mr. Everts stated that "My mother, more than any other human being, determined my character and destiny." (Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 84)

¹⁶ Powers recounts an incident pointing to the ongoing legacy of W.W. Everts outside of his family: "A short time ago, when Henrietta Mears was on a speaking engagement in Texas, she stopped by the Baptist Bookstore in Dallas and asked the clerk, 'I was just wondering if you have the Pastor's Handbook, written by Dr. W. W. Everts? It was written well over a hundred years ago and I realize that it is very old.'" "Why," said the clerk, "that's like stopping at a super market and asking if they have salt and pepper! It may have been written over a hundred years ago, but it's still selling." "How amazing," said Miss Mears,



Henrietta, age 1, with sister Margaret.



Henrietta, left, as a young girl.

the First Baptist Church of Chicago¹⁷ and one of the founders of the University of Chicago.¹⁸ Much like his granddaughter, he was characterized by energy and intensity¹⁹ and his ministry was typified by prayer,²⁰ hard work,²¹ and excellence.²² In her biography on Henrietta Mears, Barbara Hudson Powers notes other similarities between W.W. Everts and his granddaughter. "To read of Henrietta's grandmother and of her interests and achievements is almost like reading of Henrietta's activities today. To read of her grandfather is to read of Henrietta Mears, if you just change the name. It is almost humorous, except that it is so thrilling in its significance that the laughter changes to a psalm of praise." Powers continues, "Her grandfather's great principle was to have carefully written preparation for the humblest occasion. His personal conversation was 'rousing and compelling, better even than his pulpit ministry.' In a later chapter both of these are shown to be characteristics of Henrietta Mears."²³ His wife, Mrs. Margaret Everts, was an active participant in ministry who, like her granddaughter, had a special knack for evangelizing those in the entertainment industry.²⁴ Her grandmother also passed down to Henrietta a special concern for influencing young men for the Lord.²⁵

Henrietta was cognizant of the impact of her grandparents on her mother and, by

smiling happily as she looked at the copy. "My grandfather wrote it. Grandfather Everts. He was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Chicago." (Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 82)

¹⁷ First Baptist Church was considered to be "the largest and most influential church in Chicago". Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 89.

¹⁸ Madden, *Henrietta Mears*, 3.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *ibid.*, 4.

²² Much like his granddaughter, W.W. Everts' mantra was "Never aim lower than the highest point of excellence in whatever you engage". Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 4.

²³ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 83.

²⁴ Madden, *Henrietta Mears*, 5. Henrietta and her grandmother both reached out to actors and actresses, whom many in their religious traditions considered unsavory. Henrietta was responsible for founding the Hollywood Christian Group as an outreach for those in the Hollywood Entertainment Industry. The group included such actors as Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, and Colleen Townsend.

²⁵ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 83.

extension, herself. When, as an adult, she had the opportunity to read the biography of her grandmother's life, she remarked, "I'm amazed to see how many of my own policies and beliefs trace back to my grandmother. The same thinking, the same ideas and approach. She taught them to my mother, and I was almost unconsciously reared upon these same precepts."²⁶ Early on, Henrietta was able to observe the lasting impression left by a life that taught and modeled faith.

The Influence of Henrietta's Mother

However "tremendous is the spiritual influence of her forebears,"²⁷ Henrietta's life, faith, and leadership were influenced by no person more than her mother, Margaret Everts Mears.²⁸ Like her mother and father, Margaret developed "a heart to win others to Christ, a sense of accountability to God in all areas of life, a burden for prayer, a generous spirit and a desire to help the destitute personally."²⁹

Margaret Everts Mears was firmly grounded in her faith by the time she married Henrietta's father, Ashley Mears.³⁰ However, as a young mother, Margaret experienced a tragedy that further developed her faith and dependence upon the Lord. Margaret's daughter Florence died of walking typhoid at the tender age of seven. As Margaret's first daughter, Florence had been the apple of her eye. In fact, Margaret had doted so much on the child that she feared "she had been too much obsessed by her love for her daughter."³¹ When Florence died, Margaret experienced a crisis of faith, which she described as "feeling like the whole world drained out through a small hole and left

²⁶ *ibid.*, 83.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 82.

²⁸ Clinton, "Focused Lives," 341.

²⁹ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 7.

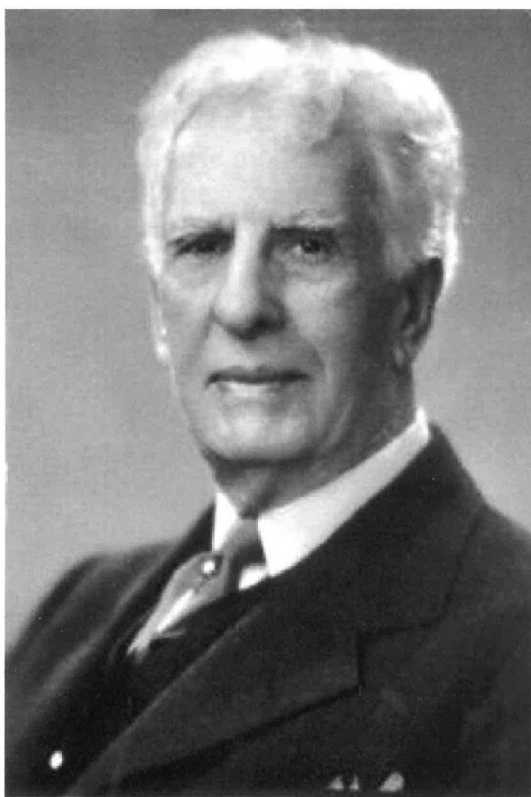
³⁰ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 89.

³¹ *ibid.*, 92.



Henrietta's mother, Margaret Everts Mears, had an indelible impact on Henrietta's life and ministry. Margaret modeled the practice of prayer and Scripture reading for Henrietta and helped her develop leadership skills.

W. B. Riley, pastor of First Baptist Church Minneapolis, was also a major influence on Henrietta's life and ministry. When Margaret Mears died, he prayed that Margaret's spiritual mantle would fall on Henrietta.



nothing.”³² However, Margaret came through the experience with a real sense of the presence of Christ, and from then on, her “life was completely devoted to God’s work.”³³

Margaret was 42 years old when Henrietta was born in 1890.³⁴ Because her six brothers and sisters were significantly older, Henrietta’s mother had an extra portion of time and wisdom to bestow on her young daughter.³⁵ Mrs. Mears, touted as “God’s most significant influence in the shaping of Henrietta,”³⁶ developed Henrietta’s faith and leadership in two primary ways: through her own example, and by encouraging Henrietta to test her wings in leadership.³⁷

The Example of Mother Mears

Margaret Everts Mears modeled her belief in the power of God and the practice of spiritual disciplines to her young daughter.³⁸ In contrast to her diminutive frame,³⁹ Mrs. Mears believed that her legacy should loom large in the life of her child. She took the job of being a mother very seriously, believing that

the childhood years were the years when the children were like plastic clay and the mother’s fingers were modeling the shape, determining whether the life would be a shallow dish or a deep bowl capable of holding great blessings to overflow to others.⁴⁰

³² *ibid.*

³³ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 34.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 93.

³⁶ Clinton, “Focused Lives,” 345.

³⁷ Section III of this paper will demonstrate that this is the same method of leadership development embraced by Henrietta Mears.

³⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 44.

³⁹ Margaret Everts Mears never topped 98 lbs. during her lifetime. Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 92.

⁴⁰ Margaret Everts Mears quoted in Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 95.

Consequently, Margaret was very intentional about modeling a Christian life to her children and especially emphasized the disciplines of prayer and scripture reading.

Modeling Prayer

Mother Mears was very devoted to the practice of prayer, and prayed on her knees from 9:00 am to 10:00 am every morning.⁴¹ Henrietta often flitted in and out of her mother's room during these times of prayer until one day, she decided to pray for an entire hour as well.⁴² Although her young mind was completely unsuccessful in coming up with the content of an hour-long prayer,⁴³ she did learn to value regular communication with the Lord.^{44,45}

As she matured, Henrietta's belief in prayer increased. When she was 12 years old, she contracted a severe strain of muscular rheumatism which proved fatal to one of her friends.⁴⁶ One of the symptoms of her illness was repetitive nosebleeds. Mr. Ingersoll, a friend of the Mears family, came over to pray for the nosebleeds to stop.⁴⁷

When Mr. Ingersoll arrived, he said, "Henrietta, do you believe the Lord can heal you?"

Henrietta looked up at him and said, in her direct way, "He created us. I see no reason why He cannot heal us."⁴⁸

From that moment on, she never experienced another nosebleed. Years later, crippled by her rheumatism but emboldened in her prayer, she asked Mr. Ingersoll to pray for total healing from her rheumatism. Immediately after his prayer, Henrietta became assured of her healing, and rapidly experienced a complete restoration of her health with no

⁴¹ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 106.

⁴² Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 59.

⁴³ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 34.

⁴⁴ Later in life, she was known for her regular and extended periods of prayer. This will be discussed further in Section III.

⁴⁵ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 8.

⁴⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 67.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 100.

recurrence of rheumatism.⁴⁹

Modeling a Love of Scripture

Mother Mears also engendered a love and appreciation for scripture in her young daughter. Margaret regularly read scripture to young Henrietta and tried to adapt the language to make it more comprehensible to a child.⁵⁰ Additionally, she looked for opportunities to illustrate the importance of regular scripture reading through parables encountered in everyday life.

Although young Henrietta loved to garden, she was often inconsistent in her care for her budding flowers. After forgetting to water her plants for days at a time, she would attempt to make up for lost time by giving them days worth of water all at once, which ended up drowning the flowers. Mrs. Mears saw an opportunity for a spiritual application. “You see, Henrietta, it is just the same in our spiritual life. We can plant the seed of God’s Word and then forget about it. We neglect prayer and Bible study until our spiritual life had died, parched and dried. We cannot then suddenly attempt to immerse ourselves in a great dose of spiritual things and think we will take care of the neglect.” She continued, “You cannot cure a garden dying of thirst by drowning it in water, neither can you cure your spiritual life that is dying of neglect by drowning it in a flood of Bible study. The neglect has already done its harm. There must be daily, regular attention to your spiritual life as well as to your garden.”⁵¹

Mother Mears was a master at explaining biblical concepts using words and imagery her children could understand. For example, when a disobedient child repented, she assured them of her forgiveness. However, in order to demonstrate that someone

⁴⁹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 68.

⁵⁰ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 8.

⁵¹ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 52.

must pay for their wrongdoing, she would “pay the penalty” for their sins by denying herself butter—one of her great delights—for a specified number of meals.⁵² Thus, when she explained to her children that Jesus died on the cross to pay for their sins, they had a framework for understanding the concept. Although the analogy between Mother Mears denying herself butter and Jesus dying on the cross for their sins might seem a bit strained, it was a very effective image for their young minds. Nothing made them happier than the meal where they were finally able to pass Mother the butter after she “paid” for their offense!⁵³

Mother Mears believed that no child was too young to learn about the kingdom of God or participate in its activities. She allowed her daughter to attend prayer meetings during the week if she desired⁵⁴ and took her seriously when she expressed interest in joining the church at age seven.⁵⁵ Even at such a young age, Henrietta was able to articulate her faith to her mother: “I realize that I’m a sinner. Why, mother, you know how sinful I am! And I know that Jesus is my Savior. You’re always trying to get everyone to accept Christ as Savior, and I’m ready. I want to join the church.”⁵⁶ Much to her chagrin, Henrietta’s frank and precocious declaration of her faith preceding her baptism caused some in the congregation to snicker.⁵⁷ Henrietta feared she had misspoken, but her mother reassured her that the adults were simply surprised that one so young could comprehend so much.

Henrietta’s youthful love of prayer and scripture taught her a valuable lesson later

⁵² Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 62.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 94.

⁵⁵ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 61.

⁵⁶ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 94.

⁵⁷ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 35.

in life. She realized that children are often able to understand more about spiritual things than adults give them credit for, they simply need for someone to explain Christianity in a simple, age-appropriate way. Accordingly, Henrietta later established a publishing company that produced creative, age-appropriate curriculum for children's Sunday School classes.⁵⁸

Leadership Training through Participation

In addition to modeling spiritual disciplines, Mother Mears developed Henrietta's leadership potential by training her to think like a leader. Margaret encouraged Henrietta's initiative and sense of responsibility in every situation. When Henrietta complained that a party was boring, Mother Mears asked her what she had done to make it more interesting.⁵⁹ When Henrietta complained that a church meeting was dry, Mother Mears asked if she had given a testimony.⁶⁰ Consequently, Henrietta learned early on to take initiative in solving problems and creating solutions.

This sense of responsibility led Henrietta to become active in ministry and leadership early in life. At the age of 10, Henrietta and her cousin Margaret Buckbee formed a group called "The Willing Workers" whose goal was "doing good for unfortunates."⁶¹ At age 11, Henrietta taught her first Sunday School class.⁶² She accompanied her brother to the Berean mission on Sunday nights, and seeing that there was no one to teach the junior class, she volunteered for the position.⁶³ These early experiences in leadership, albeit in small roles, provided valuable insight and experience

⁵⁸ This curriculum, and the subsequent founding of the Gospel Light Publishing company, will be discussed later in the paper.

⁵⁹ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 10.

⁶⁰ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 37.

⁶¹ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 105.

⁶² Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 37.

⁶³ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 99.

as she began to undertake incrementally larger leadership roles.

Chapter Two

God's Progressive Call

By the time Henrietta left to go to college, she had already led several clubs and Sunday Schools. When she arrived at the University of Minnesota, Henrietta took leadership of a women's Bible study that grew from only a few members to over 60 members.⁶⁴ It was during her time in college, as her leadership skills were affirmed by other believers, that God began to reveal his call for her life. Henrietta perceived God's call in three progressive stages.

Stage 1: Dr. Riley's challenge

While Henrietta was studying Chemistry at the University of Minnesota,⁶⁵ Margaret Everts Mears passed away. Margaret's death left a void in the lives of Henrietta and many others. Dr. W.B. Riley, Henrietta's minister, wrote a glowing tribute of Mrs. Mears after her death.

Margaret Burtis Mears was the daughter of Dr. W.W. Everts, so long the pastor of the First Church, in Chicago, and so well and widely known. Those who knew his wife, the mother of Margaret Burtis, could see in Mrs. Mears a combination of the excellent characteristics of both parents. In intellect she had few equals; keen, inquiring, aggressive, confident. She literally reveled in the word of God, and came as nearly walking according to its sacred precepts as is possible in the sinful flesh.

As a Bible teacher she had few equals in the city of Minneapolis. And in "the practice of the presence of God" she had no superiors. Like Martin Luther of old, one and two hours a day she spent upon her knees. When she appeared before a great class of young women on Sunday they gave audience to one they knew had been in the

⁶⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 75.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 72.



Henrietta at age 18, the year she graduated from high school.



Henrietta at age 23, graduating from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Chemistry.

presence of God, believed that her message was direct from the Spirit. When she visited the homes of the poor, or talked with the convicted sinner, they alike understood that a messenger from the Holy One was at work for Him.⁶⁶

At Mrs. Mears' funeral, Dr. Riley took Henrietta aside and said, "Henrietta, I hope the spiritual mantle of your mother will fall upon you."⁶⁷ She, however, was unsure that she could live up to the legacy of her mother. She came to realize that if God had any big plans for her life, He would have to supply the power. She said, "I read my Bible for every reference to the Holy Spirit and His power. The greatest realization came to me when I saw that there was nothing I had to do to receive His power but to submit to Christ, to allow Him to control me." She continued, "I had been trying to do everything myself; now I let Christ take me completely. I said to Christ that if He wanted anything from me that He would have to do it Himself. My life was changed from that moment on."

Stage 2: A Visit from Evelyn Camp

After graduating from college, Henrietta became an acclaimed Chemistry teacher and high school principal and led a number of well-attended Bible studies and Sunday School classes as a layperson. She built one of these Sunday School classes, the Fidelis class, from only one student to over 500 members.⁶⁸

As a Senior in High School, Henrietta and her friend Evelyn Camp had declared their willingness to serve in some sort of Christian ministry during a church meeting. Evelyn eventually felt led to mission work in Japan, but although Henrietta felt drawn to foreign missions, she experienced no such leading. Frustrated with the lack of clarity in

⁶⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 53.

⁶⁷ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 41.

⁶⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 89.

her call to ministry, Henrietta nevertheless committed herself to follow God's call wherever it led.⁶⁹ While teaching the Fidelis Sunday School class, Henrietta invited her old friend Evelyn Camp, now a missionary in Japan, to be a guest speaker. After Evelyn's talk, several of the girls in her class were inspired to go into mission work. Henrietta was touched as she saw student after student respond to the call of God on their lives, and realized that her own call was being clarified. She was called to train leaders and to "nurture the spiritual growth in thousands who could go in her place to penetrate the world with the Gospel of Christ. Only one Henrietta could have gone to Japan—or to anywhere else. Instead of sending her, God was asking her to multiply herself in the lives of the many others whom He would then send out in her place."⁷⁰

Stage 3: First Presbyterian Church, Hollywood

Henrietta continued teaching public school and Christian education until she accepted a call from Stuart MacClennan to serve as the Director of Christian Education at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. She was 38 years old when she accepted the call to full-time Christian service, nearly 21 years after she publicly expressed her willingness to serve in ministry.⁷¹ Although her final call to ministry was long in coming, God used the lessons she had learned in childhood and the many experiences she had in leadership to make her effective from her first day on the job.⁷²

As the Director of Christian Education at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Henrietta built and oversaw a thriving Sunday School program and taught the expansive

⁶⁹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 69.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 91.

⁷¹ Clinton, "Focused Lives," 336.

⁷² *ibid.*



In 1928, Henrietta became the Director of Christian Education at First Presbyterian Church, Hollywood.



One of her many responsibilities at FPC Hollywood was to teach the thriving college department. Known simply as "Teacher," Miss Mears was beloved by her students. In this photograph, Miss Mears is giving a comical "sermon" on Old Mother Hubbard from the "Book of Numbers," i.e., the phonebook.

College Department.⁷³ She also founded the Gospel Light publishing company in order to produce her acclaimed children's Sunday School curriculum and established a Christian campground, Forest Home, attended by thousands of individuals every year. However broad her responsibilities and achievements were, Henrietta never forgot that her primary call was to develop leaders, a call that permeated every area of her ministry.⁷⁴

⁷³ Her accomplishments will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

⁷⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 197.

Section II

Who Henrietta Mears Trained as Leaders

Chapter Three

Identifying Potential Leaders

One of Henrietta's gifts was recognizing leadership potential in others, often before they recognized it in themselves. She knew that God might choose to use any one of the students in the College Department to do great things for Christ! Who knew but that one of them might become the next Luther, Calvin, or John Knox?⁷⁵ She believed that one of her roles was to make students aware of their leadership potential and create an environment where that potential could be nurtured.

Teacher knew that sometimes God chose the most improbable people to be great leaders in His kingdom. Henrietta constantly marveled at the stories of unlikely leaders that she encountered in Scripture. She was especially fond of recounting the biblical story of the woman of Samaria: "This fallen woman was the most unlikely candidate for anything spiritual, but the Savior saw her potential. Her salvation was evidenced by her running off to tell others of the Messiah. This one revolutionized life started a revival in Samaria. It came about by her carrying Christ's power to everyone she met. She was magnetized for service." Henrietta believed that Jesus could have the same effect on believers today: "Jesus had a way of touching and changing a man, then using the changed man to touch and change someone else. The change that came to the village of Sychar came first to one person in that village. The Reformation that shook Europe first of all shook Luther."⁷⁶ These biblical accounts, plus the personal knowledge of what she

⁷⁵ Mears, "Leadership"

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

believed Christ had accomplished in her own life,⁷⁷ solidified her belief that God could enable anyone to be a leader.

Once she had identified a prospective leader, she took steps to help that person recognize their giftedness as well. Henrietta used her ministry (especially the College Department) to challenge her students to see what God had in mind for them, particularly with regard to vocational ministry.⁷⁸ One such student was Jimmy Arnold, a warm and vivacious college student who started to ponder God's call on his life in a most unlikely place. One summer day, Henrietta and a group of college students were riding to the beach in the back of a cattle truck. Apropos to nothing, Henrietta began asking him about his future plans. Her questions and affirmation opened a whole new world of possibilities for him. Years later, while pastoring a church in California, he wrote to Henrietta, "Among the words of wisdom that you gave to me was the question which opened my eyes to greater service to our Lord—"Have you ever thought of going to seminary, Jimmy?"⁷⁹

"Encouraging" Leadership

Henrietta immediately took steps to help a budding leader hone his or her skills, often by "thrusting" them into leadership—frequently in roles that were a step beyond their comfort zone. One such student was David Cowie. Henrietta needed someone to lead songs for the college department. In her estimation, only one student would fit the bill: David Cowie. So, one Sunday, Henrietta announced to Cowie that he would be leading the songs that night. No amount of protestation on his part would convince Henrietta—she simply pushed him out of the office and told him to go practice. His cries

⁷⁷ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 179.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 197.

⁷⁹ Arnold, Jimmy. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

of protest could be heard through her office door! But, at the end of the day, he led the singing. Cowie later wrote that Teacher “puts you on your mettle to produce. You had to do it and she wanted you to be able to do it, to feel the sole responsibility, and not to have any feeling that she would do it for you. She literally forced me into being a leader. She pushed me into responsibility.”⁸⁰ Her “encouragement” paid off—Cowie became a successful minister. Many other students have also reminisced about the impact of Henrietta’s early “stretching” roles on their lives. In a letter to Miss Mears, one student quipped, “Do you remember what you did to me – you picked me up by the scruff of my neck and slapped me smack-dab into the middle of ‘God’s Plan of the Ages’!! Imagine – from the first year of the Junior department to the third year of Junior High. That’s my Teacher!”⁸¹ Her secretary, Ethel May Baldwin, also jested about Henrietta’s ambitious plans for her, and wrote about Teacher wrestling with her “as God wrestled with Jacob.”⁸² Despite the fact that Teacher “pushed” all of these students into leadership, all of them were successful in their tasks and grew in their abilities. Teacher once said that, “a man generally lives up to what is expected of him,”⁸³ and she often expected more from her students than they believed they were capable of. However, Henrietta’s “enthusiasm and challenge and drive broke down resistance even in those adamantly convinced she had overestimated their capabilities for particular jobs.”⁸⁴

It is important to note the distinction between pushing people into leadership roles, which she did repeatedly, and pushing them into full-time ministry, which she never did. Henrietta believed that a great God called *all* men and women to do great

⁸⁰ Letter from David Cowie, Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 85.

⁸¹ Jones, Josephine. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

⁸² Baldwin, Ethel May. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

⁸³ Nelson, “*She Wrote Things Worth Reading*,” 6.

⁸⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 102.

things, and inspired her students to seek His best will for their life. On the other hand, she realized not all were called to vocational service, and she never presumed that anyone was. But even those who were not called to ministry could still accomplish great things for the Lord. She once said, "So many people are willing to be bellhops for the Lord, standing around waiting for someone to give them some little errand to do for Him, instead of asking the Lord to give them His greatest will for their lives. There are so few who want to do the big things for God. You should not be content to pump the organ if God wants you to play on it."⁸⁵

Those Called to Ministry

Henrietta made it a point to never tell anyone that they were called to the ministry. In her estimation, to do so would be foolish: only the Holy Spirit can call a person.⁸⁶ In fact, many aspiring ministers who shared their sense of call with her encountered quite a different response than they expected. Rather than expressing her approval, she would repeatedly question their call and whether they might be called to anything else. Only when a person convinced her that they would not be satisfied with any other vocation did she finally offer her support.⁸⁷ Despite this rigorous ritual, over 400 of her young people went on to full-time Christian service.⁸⁸ When asked about this overwhelming "accomplishment," Henrietta responded that

so many people come to me and ask me how I get so many young men to go into the ministry and I just laugh, because I've never asked anyone to go into the ministry. In fact, you would think I was discouraging them rather than encouraging them. When they ask me if I think they would make good ministers, I tell them it isn't a question of what I

⁸⁵ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 166.

⁸⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 197.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 204.

⁸⁸ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 28.

think at all; it's only a question of whether it is God's will. I tell them that if they can do anything else under the sun they shouldn't go into the ministry, because it is a marathon of moral courage, mental power, and spiritual and physical endurance...All who have gone into the ministry from here have definitely been called by the Holy Spirit and not by any human voice. All I do is hold up God's love and create an atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit can speak to their hearts."⁸⁹

One young man interested in ministry was Donn Moomaw, an All-American football player who struggled with the decision of whether to be a pastor or play football for the Rams.⁹⁰ True to form, Henrietta would not make the decision for him, but trusted the Lord's leadership in his life and encouraged him to do the same. This lesson affected not only Moomaw, but other students as well. Nearly a decade later, another individual who observed the incident wrote to Henrietta, "All the time Donn was struggling, you were praying and trusting the Lord to guide him in His own direction. It wasn't long before God made it clear to Donn what he should do. The transforming lesson he learned from you was, *"God assumes the responsibility to guide His own."*⁹¹

⁸⁹ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 78.

⁹⁰ Mears, "Leadership".

⁹¹ Murray, Charles. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961. Emphasis mine.

Chapter Four

Training Capable Leaders

Henrietta believed that God could call anyone to ministry, no matter how unlikely a candidate they seemed. However, she also believed that just like Peter and the Samaritan woman, effective leaders need to be transformed and matured in their faith. Thus, Henrietta looked for leaders who were Godly, humble, and willing to pay the price of leadership.

The Need for Capable Leaders

Henrietta lamented the fact that so many jobs in the church were given to those who were willing rather than those who were able. She emphasized the need to choose leaders who had the attributes and abilities necessary to do a job well, not simply choosing leaders who had “nothing else to do.”⁹² Some of Henrietta’s handwritten notes on how to choose leaders in the College Department divulge her desire to choose capable leaders:

Choosing Leadership:

Its Importance:

Jesus prayed all night before choosing disciples.

I. First *evaluate officers-objectively*

President:

-Ability?

-Training?

-Can he gain loyalty of group?

Personnel: don’t choose one who is out of communication with group.

Be cold and objective. Consider posts, not officers, the office, not the man or woman.

⁹² Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 44.

II. Write a list of all persons in class who can be used in any office. Make this list available to the whole committee. Let class make suggestions for main officers.

III. Start with office at bottom of list and work up. By the end, the one for president will be well discussed and evaluated.

IV. Let each candidate know what is *demand*ed of his office.⁹³

While Henrietta clearly believed that God could make anyone a leader, she would not risk the effectiveness of her programs by allowing someone to lead who was not committed both to the Lord and to seeing the job done well.

Choosing Godly Leaders

Henrietta believed that the effectiveness of her leadership style was based on God's power, not her own. Thus, when identifying potential leaders, she looked for those whose leadership would rely on the power of God rather than merely their own abilities. She stated that "Christ-confidence plus human humility would seem to be the formula for all effective Christian workers."⁹⁴ In other words, truly effective leaders need God to lead, direct, and empower their activity.⁹⁵ Henrietta believed that "God does not always choose great people to accomplish what He wishes, but chooses a person who is wholly yielded to Him."⁹⁶

Henrietta taught that the most important element of effective Christian leadership is being in close communion with the Lord. She described this necessity in terms of a

⁹³ Henrietta Mears' hand-written notes on choosing leadership. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁴ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 159.

⁹⁵ It is sometimes difficult to know where the balance lies between God's leading and a leader's activity. Henrietta once said, "Allow God to tell you what you are to do. But you say, 'Miss Mears, I don't know what God wants me to do. I've been praying about it for months, and I just don't know. Well, is there the faintest glimmer of light? It may be ever so small. What is it? Follow it! And as you do, God will reveal the rest.'" Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 201.

⁹⁶ Nelson, "She Wrote Things Worth Reading," 7.

vertical/horizontal paradigm. In order to be effective in his or her “horizontal” relationships (i.e., relationships with people), a leader’s “vertical” relationship (i.e., relationship with the Lord”) must be well maintained. While ministers might feel pressed by the need to maintain “horizontal” relationships, Mears believed that neglecting to maintain the vertical relationship with the Lord through prayer, Bible study, and communion will lead to certain failure on both axes. She explained that, “as we lose our connection with God, the effect of the life we live on the horizontal becomes powerless and meaningless.”⁹⁷

Maintaining a Relationship with God

Mears maintained that there were several elements required to sustain a powerful “vertical” connection with God. First, a leader “should be a person who has had a vital experience of knowing Christ as Savior and Lord.”⁹⁸ Second, a leader “should be living in daily fellowship with Him as the Lord of his life.”⁹⁹ This daily fellowship was to include “a vital personal prayer life”¹⁰⁰ and attendance at “regular worship services, camps, conferences, and other special events.”¹⁰¹ Mears believed that spiritual disciplines such as these would provide dual blessings in a leader’s ministry. First, maintaining spiritual disciplines provided an example of Christian living to others¹⁰² who would be encouraged toward the same habits. Henrietta was committed to ensuring that leaders reproduced themselves by cultivating these disciplines in other aspiring leaders. Second, an “evident and productive relationship with Christ”¹⁰³ would allow God to work

⁹⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 158.

⁹⁸ Henrietta Mears’ Teaching Notes: “The Leadership,” Gospel Light Archives

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 126.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

through a leader to accomplish His purposes through His power. However, she also believed that it required more than simple spiritual disciplines to be wholly yielded to the Lord, since it was fruitless to “keep the outward form but deny the power thereof.”¹⁰⁴ And it was only in coming to the end of oneself that the power of God might truly be discovered.

Training Humble Leaders

Henrietta was convinced that only with humble recognition of one’s own limitations came true submission to the power of the Holy Spirit. In her biography of Miss Mears, Barbara Hudson Powers tells us that

Looking over her years of Christian work and reviewing the thousands of lives she has witnessed in Christian service, Miss Mears has concluded that every Christian who is really going to accomplish anything in the work of the Kingdom must have a “crisis” experience, over and apart from accepting Christ as personal Savior. She has never seen really effective Christian leaders who are truly accomplishing work for the Lord who have not, at some time, come to the complete end of self, overwhelmed with personal inadequacy, aware of how little they have and of their tremendous limitations in trying to serve the Lord and live the Christian life. Then, in the crisis of this experience, they allow the Holy Spirit to take over complete possession of their lives.¹⁰⁵

Henrietta believed that all Christian leaders must come to such a realization of the inadequacy of their own self and the sufficiency of the Lord in order to have a truly powerful ministry. Mears explained this using the analogy of kitchen appliances. When a toaster is plugged in to a source of electricity, it is enabled to make toast. When a blender is plugged in to a source of electricity, it is enabled to blend. Likewise, when a leader is “plugged in” to the power of God, his or her natural capabilities and learned

¹⁰⁴ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*



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skills are empowered.¹⁰⁶

Training Those Willing to Make the Sacrifice of Leadership

While being humbly connected to the power of God is the primary qualification for leadership, hard work and training are also necessities. A person desirous of being a leader must be willing to pay the price of leadership. Being a leader, like being an athlete, requires sacrifice. According to Mears, “The regulations for leadership are similar to those for athletes. You do not have the privilege of making touchdowns until you have paid the penalty of consistent training. An athlete must deny himself late hours, the round of social occasions and many other things.” She continues, “A spiritual leader must realize the cost that must be met to be a success: there is the sacrifice of other interests, a dedication of time; he must be completely dedicated to ‘This one thing I do.’ A leader must be willing to work. The visions, dreams, prayers, desires, inspiration must resolve themselves in good, hard work. Nothing can take the place of it.”¹⁰⁷ Henrietta expected excellence from her leaders, and believed that excellence comes at a cost.¹⁰⁸ When asked if there were such a thing as a born teacher, she replied, “Yes, if we mean one who is born to be made a teacher and who is willing to pay the price of teaching.”¹⁰⁹ Henrietta did not paint a glamorous portrait of leadership. If anything, she emphasized its difficulty at the expense of its glory as a reminder that leadership is hard work. She sought to ensure that any person to whom she assigned a task had the time, energy, and resources to complete it—and most of all, that they were willing to put in the necessary

¹⁰⁶ “Henrietta.” Produced and directed by Hollywood Presbyterian Church, 1988. Videocassette.

¹⁰⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 158-159.

¹⁰⁸ This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Nelson, “*She Wrote Things Worth Reading*,” 7.

effort.¹¹⁰ She required all of her leaders to prepare for every meeting, even when it was an informal planning meeting between two people.¹¹¹ But ample preparation ensured good results, and provided valuable training for young men going into the pastorate.¹¹²

Henrietta's High Expectations

These high expectations of “doing big things for God” intimidated some of her students who believed that they were incapable of greatness. Regardless, Teacher pushed her leaders to reach their full potential, whatever that might be.¹¹³ When they completed a small task well, she encouraged them to undertake a larger task, then a larger task, until they had exceeded all their expectations of themselves.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 158.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² Miss Mears would tell new pastors, “You can’t just prepare your sermon for Sunday morning. You have to know that the janitor is there to sweep the church, that the soloist is there, etc... You can’t do anything well unless every detail is well planned, and I find that doing things with a zest and having every detail perfect challenges people; they like to get on a band wagon that is really moving.” Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 168.

¹¹³ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 201.

¹¹⁴ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 160.

Chapter Five

Training Men for Leadership

Although she herself was a woman in church leadership, Henrietta admittedly targeted men to serve as leaders in the church. Although she developed female leaders as well, she focused on cultivating young men for Christian service. These young men were often called “Miss Mears’ boys.”¹¹⁵ Her desire to cultivate male leadership was both pragmatic and theological.

The Rationale for Male Leadership

The Fundamentalist ethos of the 1920’s through 1940’s sometimes emphasized a masculine, virile Christian message over against what some considered to be liberal, effeminate theology held by Modernists.¹¹⁶ It is possible that Mears, who grew up in a church pastored by Fundamentalist leader William Bell Riley, may have been influenced by this line of thinking.¹¹⁷ Regardless, Henrietta saw a correlation between strong male leadership and a virile Christian message.¹¹⁸ She believed that God had always called men to lead His church¹¹⁹, and that their active leadership would result in the most effective forms of evangelism and discipleship for both men and women. She often spoke inspiring words to her male leaders, painting a picture of building the kingdom for Christ in strong, virile, masculine language: “Bring me men to match my mountains, bring me men to match my plains, men with empires in their purpose...” Teacher quoted.

¹¹⁵ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 195.

¹¹⁶ Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 64-65.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 197.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 198.

“That’s the way it is in building spiritual empires. We need to see the vision of the living Christ, need to find men who will dare to be true to the calling of Christ, need men who will build an empire for God. There will always be enough work for the women to do as we follow in their steps.”¹²⁰ Henrietta painted a picture of Jesus as a stalwart, masculine leader.

Christ is the ideal leader,” she said, “men leave their professions, their homes, their companions to follow Him. He inspired them to do their best, to be their highest self. Jesus must have been a physically vibrant person, radiating energy and confidence, mental alertness and interest in everything about Him. Think of Him being able to speak to a crowd of many thousands of people—without a microphone! See Him walking through cities, His head high, His shoulders thrown back, bursting with good will, kindness, courage, and faith! No wonder the multitudes followed him!”¹²¹

Henrietta believed that this sort of sturdy male leadership would produce similar results in her program. Consequently, “Her youth lived and worked in an atmosphere of spiritual giants whose powerful preaching greatly impacted their impressionable minds. Sunday after Sunday, at worship services of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, the oncoming generation of leaders—eager to hear, learn, and grow—filled the front rows, for they had before them the very finest men of God as their examples.”¹²² Roe affirms Henrietta’s belief that future leaders were affected by such strong models: “These future theologues looked at their leaders and saw virile, intelligent, purposeful men who were profoundly conscious of a great God. Through them, Teacher did all she could to make

¹²⁰ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 135.

¹²¹ Ethel May Baldwin, *Henrietta Mears and How She Did It* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1966), 335-336.

¹²² Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 217.

the pulpit attractive to the most active and ambitious young Christians.”¹²³

Men Serving in Christian Education

Henrietta worked hard to counter the mindset that Christian Education belonged solely to the realm of women, and actively recruited capable, professional men to serve as Sunday School teachers and the leaders of Sunday School departments.¹²⁴ It was not unusual to have professional educators, lawyers, and builders serving as Sunday School teachers, even for young children. Henrietta believed that boys need strong male examples.¹²⁵ A lack of male leadership in the church might mean that young men might not attend church programs.¹²⁶ Consequently, she closely monitored her programs to make sure that there were a roughly equal number of boys and girls,¹²⁷ and that capable male leaders were put in place whenever possible.

College Men

Believing that 90 percent of the world's future leaders were products of the university system,¹²⁸ Henrietta especially focused her attention on developing young men into leaders in her college department.^{129,130} She once stated, “if I can get the best examples of young men to attend, I can always get the beautiful young women to

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 68.

¹²⁵ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 49.

¹²⁶ To this effect, Henrietta stated that “If there are no strong men leaders in the church, you will wind up with 22 girls and perhaps three fellows in the youth groups. In the Church of the Living God, God has always called men to be leaders.” Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 198.

¹²⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 135.

¹²⁸ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 49.

¹²⁹ Miss Mears often referred to these young men as “her boys.”

¹³⁰ Some ministers who came through Miss Mear's college department similarly strove to cultivate leadership among the young men in their church. Glenn Zachary wrote to Henrietta that, “God has blessed me with ten young men I call my ‘preacher boys’. The dedication and zeal of these fellows, most of whom I led to Christ are a source of great joy. I know your heart must swell and almost burst with joy and praise as you recall hundreds of young people who heard God's call through your ministry.”

follow!”¹³¹ Henrietta encouraged both men and women to serve in the expansive executive board of the College Department, but the most visible roles—including the role of president—were reserved for college men.¹³² Miss Mears also created several organizations to further train men called into Christian ministry.¹³³

A Paradox?

It may seem a bit paradoxical that a woman who exercised such authority felt so strongly about leading men to leadership. Brotherton tells us that,

in 1927, for a single woman to take risks, cast vision, head organizations, even to lead men, was unusual. It’s true that Hollywood offered her an unusually accepting climate, open to innovation; but her innovations were atypical for the day and age, particularly in faith-based environments that can be prone to resisting change and originality.¹³⁴

In many ways, her exercise of leadership in the church seemed to extend the normal boundaries enjoyed by women of her day. Colleen Townsend Evans referred to her as “a woman ahead of her time”¹³⁵ for good reason: Miss Mears exercised a great deal of authority in her church,¹³⁶ as well as enjoying an extensive speaking ministry, receiving an honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Bob Jones University,¹³⁷ and being asked to head the department of Christian Education and serve as a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary.¹³⁸ Perhaps due to her personal identification with the Apostle Paul,¹³⁹ much of

¹³¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 197.

¹³² Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 51.

¹³³ These organizations will be expounded upon in the next chapter.

¹³⁴ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 147-148.

¹³⁵ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 110.

¹³⁶ Betsy Cox, “Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director”, (Master’s Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1961), 25.

¹³⁷ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 130.

¹³⁸ Ockenga, Harold John. Letter to Henrietta Mears. April 20, 1951.

¹³⁹ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 112.

her work has been considered apostolic in nature.¹⁴⁰ In fact, Dr. Richard C. Halverson, former chaplain of the US Senate and one of Miss Mears' students, stated that he "thought of Henrietta Mears as a female Apostle Paul: in fact, I often referred to her as the 'Epistle Paul.' There is simply no way to exaggerate her effectiveness as a teacher, communicator, and inspirer."¹⁴¹ Miss Mears has been touted as a great woman evangelist¹⁴² and one of Southern California's best preachers.¹⁴³ Dr. Wilbur Smith, respected professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, once offered his opinion that "Dr. Henrietta Mears has done more for the implantation of the Word of God in the hearts of young people, and for the entire world of Sunday School activity than any other woman (and than most men) in America in this twentieth century."¹⁴⁴

However, as novel as some of her roles may have been, Henrietta would have scorned the title of "preacher," believing such a position to be reserved for men only.¹⁴⁵ Though it was not uncommon for her to speak in front of large congregations, she refused to stand at the pulpit.¹⁴⁶ Instead of endeavoring to become a pastor,¹⁴⁷ she chose to support her pastors, building them up whenever possible.¹⁴⁸ In fact, she often counseled women that "the best investment they could make in their lives was to make a man look good."¹⁴⁹ In return, her pastors afforded her a great deal of freedom and responsibility. For example, although officially she was subordinate to the Minister of Education and the

¹⁴⁰ Cindy Jacobs, author of *Women of Destiny* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1998, 1992) cites Miss Mears as an example of a woman who exercised the gifts of an apostle.

¹⁴¹ Jacobs, *Women of Destiny*, 193.

¹⁴² Bunts, J. R. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁴³ When asked who is the best preacher in Southern California, Dr. Clarence Roddy (professor of homiletics at Fuller Theological Seminary) stated unequivocally: "Henrietta Mears". Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 152.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, Wilbur. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁴⁵ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 152.

¹⁴⁶ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 110.

¹⁴⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 58.

¹⁴⁸ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 110.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 111.

Christian Education Committee, functionally she worked directly under the Session of the church.¹⁵⁰

Effectiveness as a Female Leader

Miss Mears never strove to achieve titles or recognition. In fact, she was noted as being devoid of professional jealousy, and one who genuinely appreciated the accomplishments of others, even when they outstripped her own.¹⁵¹ She was committed to never being placed on a pedestal, fearing the effects should she stumble.¹⁵² After all, Henrietta Mears believed that Christ should be lifted up, not her. This attitude of humility seemed to open doors for her professionally. Vonette Bright stated that, “She had such a winsome manner about her that somehow you forgot about anything ‘gender.’”¹⁵³

Henrietta Mears had no intention of being a trailblazer for women in ministry. She simply wanted to fulfill God’s call on her life. Henrietta had repeatedly felt God’s call on her life to raise up disciples of Christ who could turn around and raise up more disciples of Christ, which involved teaching scripture to both men and women. Louis Evans once stated that, “She had tremendous confidence in her God. She knew what God had called her to do and didn’t bother about the theology of ‘Women couldn’t do this or couldn’t do that.’ She was called, so she did it.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Cox, “Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director”, 25.

¹⁵¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 214.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, 104.

¹⁵³ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 111.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

Chapter Six

Training Women for Leadership

Though Henrietta Mears focused on leading men to leadership, she developed many female leaders as well.¹⁵⁵ After all, “she believed that the biblical order was male headship, not male dominance.”¹⁵⁶ For example, her desire for Sunday School departments to be headed by men stemmed from pragmatic issues related to providing role models for young boys rather than a belief that women could not adequately fill the role. When she first arrived at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood and set out to find leaders for the various departments, she could not find a suitable male leader for the Junior High Department.¹⁵⁷ So she approached the woman she deemed most suitable for the job and asked her to take the department “until the right man could be found.”¹⁵⁸ This arrangement became a longstanding joke, for the “right man” was not found for twelve years,¹⁵⁹ when the woman’s move to another city forced a change in personnel. In the mean time, this young woman—Esther Ellinghusen—built a thriving department¹⁶⁰ as well as helping Miss Mears research and write new Sunday School curriculum in her budding publishing company.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 198.

¹⁵⁶ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 110.

¹⁵⁷ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 199.

¹⁵⁸ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 135.

¹⁵⁹ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 112.

¹⁶⁰ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 199.

¹⁶¹ The immense success of and demand for the curriculum written by Mears and Ellinghusen resulted in the founding of Gospel Light Press, a publishing company which made biblically grounded, aesthetically pleasing, age-appropriate Sunday School Curriculum for children. GLP has grown immensely, but remains committed to Mear’s commitment to scripture and excellence. The press, headed by relative Bill Grieg III, celebrated its 70th anniversary this year.

Developing Women in Ministry

Many women in her college department would go on to full-time Christian ministry. One former female student credits Teacher's college department as "largely responsible for getting me started toward being a director of Christian education"¹⁶² and another former female student states that her experiences with Henrietta were the "personal launching for my first experience as a Director of Christian Education."¹⁶³ One of the many young women that Henrietta led to Christ was Vonette Zachary, who was a staunch "pagan" before she met Miss Mears. Her fiancé, Bill Bright, had recently become a Christian and was desperate for Vonette to come to Christ as well. Finally, Vonette agreed to meet with Teacher, and after a 90-minute meeting, came to salvation.¹⁶⁴ Vonette and Bill Bright were heavily influenced by Henrietta¹⁶⁵ and together founded Campus Crusade for Christ.¹⁶⁶

Summary: Who Henrietta Mears Developed as a Leader

Henrietta Mears believed that any person could be a leader, contingent upon their willingness to rely on the power of God for leadership and pay the penalty of hard work and training to hone their leadership skills. Henrietta identified and trained potential leaders, including but not limited to young men headed to ministry. The next section of this paper will outline how Miss Mears trained these nascent leaders.

¹⁶² Redding, Mary Frances. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁶³ Knieriemen, Cheryl. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁶⁴ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Bill and Vonette Bright lived with Miss Mears when they were first married.

¹⁶⁶ Marcus Brotherton gives this assessment of the significance of Campus Crusade for Christ: "Today this ministry has more than 20,000 full-time staff and 663,000 trained volunteers in 181 countries. In addition to its campus ministries, Campus Crusade acts as an umbrella for a variety of far-reaching ministries, including Athletes in Action, Josh McDowell Ministries, Student Venture, the Jesus Film, and more. One report suggests that more than 3.4 billion people have heard the gospel through the ministry begun by Bill and Vonette Bright."

Section III

How Henrietta Mears Trained Leaders

Chapter Seven

Training By Example and Experience

Henrietta devoted much of her ministry to what she considered to be the primary call on her life: developing leaders.¹⁶⁷ This call informed every area of her ministry and became “one of the great compulsions of her life.”¹⁶⁸ Mears asserted that “every church should produce its own leadership. Something is wrong if we are not. There are plenty in the church. They need to be enlisted and trained.”¹⁶⁹ And enlist and train them she did.

Influenced by biblical accounts of leadership development¹⁷⁰ and her own childhood training, Mears believed in two primary methods of leadership training: training by example, and training through experience.

Training by Example

Bill Bright once stated that Henrietta Mears trained leaders “by her life, which is the most powerful way.”¹⁷¹ Henrietta had seen the powerful effects of her mother’s example in her own life,¹⁷² and sought to influence others by her example just as her mother had influenced her.¹⁷³ Her adage was, “You teach a little bit by what you say. You teach most by what you are.”¹⁷⁴ Because Henrietta believed that a close, personal

¹⁶⁷ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 55.

¹⁶⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 121.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Powers states, “Miss Mears has learned all her psychology of leadership from the Bible by studying the ways in which God has dealt with and shaped His leaders.” Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 163.

¹⁷¹ Bill Bright quoted in Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 54.

¹⁷² Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 95.

¹⁷³ Powers states that, “The wonderful thing about Teacher is that she counsels others by her example. She isn’t satisfied with just teaching; she practices what she teaches.” Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 69.

¹⁷⁴ Henrietta Mears quoted in Nelson, “*She Wrote Things Worth Reading*,” 7.

relationship with the Lord was the primary requisite for leadership,¹⁷⁵ she sought to model several disciplines in her life: an avid prayer life, a regard for scripture, and a practice of excellence.

Training through Experience

In addition to training by example, Henrietta believed that young leaders could be developed by being allowed to lead in supervised settings. As a child, Henrietta learned leadership skills through taking on small leadership roles, such as teaching a small children's Sunday School class or leading a club, under the watchful eye of a more mature Christian.¹⁷⁶ As her abilities grew, her responsibilities grew.

In her role as the Director of Christian Education at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Henrietta sought to create an environment where budding leaders could test their wings in a supervised setting. She created these avenues for leadership development primarily through the College Department, the camping ministry, and through the creation of a variety of vocational training programs.

¹⁷⁵ This was discussed in Chapter 6.

¹⁷⁶ This was discussed in Chapter 1.

Chapter Eight

Training by Example: Prayer

Henrietta firmly believed that it is crucial for every Christian to have a vibrant prayer life and sought to model this discipline to her students. Henrietta had seen God answer prayer in her own life—even healing her from disease—and her personal experience led to a sense of expectancy when she prayed.¹⁷⁷ Henrietta summed up her philosophy of prayer in this way: “Labor at prayer, then watch God work.”¹⁷⁸ Considering the extremely long hours that she kept, one might assume that Teacher would not have much time to devote to prayer.¹⁷⁹ On the contrary, the demands of her schedule kept her—and those around her—on their knees.¹⁸⁰

Her View of Prayer

Many of her students and colleagues report being struck by the intimate nature of her prayer life: “The most prominent characteristic of her praying was her complete enthrallment with the person of Christ. She knew Him and He knew her; they were on speaking terms with each other and exercised this relationship freely.”¹⁸¹ Vonette Bright recalls that she prayed as though “she were talking to God as her very best friend.”¹⁸² Bill Grieg, Jr. believes prayer was so central to her ministry that “All the good stuff she did would not have happened if not for prayer.”¹⁸³ Many others recall that she

¹⁷⁷ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 87.

¹⁷⁸ Nelson, “*She Wrote Things Worth Reading*,” 7.

¹⁷⁹ An article written about Miss Mears in 1955 states that, “Nowadays, those who know her well say that she finds time in her busy life to pray by the simple expedient of getting up at four o’clock in the morning.” Dorothy C. Haskin, “The Fabulous Miss Mears,” *The King’s Business* (March 1955): 49.

¹⁸⁰ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 88.

¹⁸¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 219.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, 82.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, 88.

approached the throne of God with great confidence. Those who knew of her prayer life often used strong, vivid imagery to describe her boldness in prayer, saying that she would “grasp the throne of God and give it a good shake,”¹⁸⁴ that she “picked us all up in her arms of faith and lifted us right into the very presence of God,”¹⁸⁵ that she “climbed right to the bastions of heaven and threw the doors open for a fuller view of God,”¹⁸⁶ that she was like “like Elijah commanding the fire down from heaven”¹⁸⁷ and that she “ventured in on God alone crying, ‘Give me this mountain!’”¹⁸⁸ Some would even go so far as to characterize her confident prayers as “demanding” and “very, very rigorous.”¹⁸⁹ Regardless, her discipline of prayer—and the apparent ways that God so faithfully answered—engendered a similar attitude of prayer in her young leaders. One young person described it in this way:

The wonderful thing about Henrietta, I think, was—above anything else, the way she prayed. Her relationship with God was so great and so believing. Many’s the time I would hear her pray, and we’d be faced with a problem, and she’d say, “Now God, I know you’re busy, but we’ve got to have this fixed, not next week, right away. Now get on to it and get it fixed!” You could almost hear God saying, “All right, Henrietta, all right. I’ll take care of it.” And it would get fixed. Her faith was—almost like her hats—unbelievable.¹⁹⁰

Henrietta sought to teach the discipline of prayer to her young leaders in three primary ways: by encouraging and modeling an attitude of constant prayer, by praying for her students, and by establishing mandatory prayer times for leaders before every event.

¹⁸⁴ Evans, Jr. Louis. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁸⁵ Garner, Mr. & Mrs. Harold. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁸⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 218.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 219.

¹⁸⁸ Munger, Bob. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁸⁹ Dale Bruner in Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 84.

¹⁹⁰ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 219.

Method 1: Encouraging and Modeling Constant Prayer

Henrietta often served as a listening ear for students. Because her own life bore such great fruit, many students sought out her perspective on their life decisions. However, Henrietta believed that students should not rely primarily on her counsel, but on the Lord's counsel. For example, two young men struggling with a decision sought Teacher's opinion on what they should do. She advised prayer, and so they prayed. After they finished praying, the young men asked her again what decision they should make. Again, she advised prayer, and so they prayed. This continued into the afternoon, until sensing the Lord's leading, the young men finally made a decision. The lesson was clear: while seeking godly counsel is prudent, the first step to gaining wisdom is seeking the Lord.¹⁹¹ Henrietta modeled the primacy of seeking wisdom from God through prayer. Her refrain when confronted with any circumstance requiring a word from the Lord was, "To your knees!"¹⁹²

Many students profited from her insistence that they go to the Lord in prayer. As one of her students said, "I prayed for specific things and they were given. Such lessons have stayed with me and have been practiced since, and will be with me until the end of the earthly road."¹⁹³

Method Two: Praying for Students

Henrietta was known for praying that young people would come to know the Lord. However, she did not stop praying for a student when they came to Christ.¹⁹⁴ In

¹⁹¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 223-224.

¹⁹² "Henrietta". 1988.

¹⁹³ Dodd, George. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁹⁴ Tucked in the back of her Scofield Reference Bible, along with several other items, were two long, well-worn lists of names. While I cannot confirm for sure that this was her prayer list, it seems likely. It might also be a list of class names from which to choose leaders.

fact, she faithfully continued to pray for a person until he or she was well-grounded in the faith.¹⁹⁵ This was a source of great encouragement to her students, and an excellent model as well. One student later expressed his appreciation over “how we had been held in His care by you throughout these years [away].”¹⁹⁶

Henrietta’s wonderful listening skills¹⁹⁷ made her a popular audience for students wishing to discuss a variety of subjects, from deep theological questions to the latest good news in someone’s life. But whether the conversation was light-hearted and comical or serious and profound, all of Teacher’s conversations with college students ended with prayer.¹⁹⁸ She believed that “college-age people can be changed only through prayer and fasting”¹⁹⁹ and not through her words alone. When someone asked Henrietta to pray for an issue, she would faithfully remember them in her frequent and ample personal prayer times, and would be sure to follow up with students to see how a situation was progressing.²⁰⁰ “I’ll pray for you” was not flippant Christian lingo for her—she took prayer very seriously, and her students knew it. Perhaps that is why so many asked for her prayers, and why so many believed they saw God work in powerful ways. Likewise, Henrietta asked for prayer from many other people, and was committed to having prayer partners for her ministry.²⁰¹

Method Three: Prayer in Preparation for Ministry

Henrietta taught her leaders that prayer was indispensable to their ministry. She organized a mandatory prayer time for her College Department Executive Board on

¹⁹⁵ Larson, Cliff and Barbara. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 170.

¹⁹⁸ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 59.

¹⁹⁹ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 140.

²⁰⁰ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 59.

²⁰¹ Grieg Jr. in Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 87.

Saturday mornings at 6:00 am.²⁰² With little introduction,²⁰³ the students assumed a posture of prayer and spoke with the Lord for two hours.²⁰⁴ This time of preparation through prayer was so important to Henrietta that she declared she would not teach on Sunday mornings if they did not pray on Saturday mornings.²⁰⁵ Her leaders came to echo her belief that her success was not based on her own efforts and ministry strategy, but on her absolute dependence on the Lord.²⁰⁶

Not only did Henrietta teach her students to pray by example, she also offered specific instructions. "Don't waste words on the Lord," she would say. "Tell Him definitely what's on your mind."^{207,208} Additionally, she gave them a paradigm for how to pray, stating that there are "five dimensions of prayer: First, a period of thanksgiving to the Lord for His gifts, mercies and blessings; second, confession of one's failures and request for forgiveness; third, intercession for others and their needs; fourth, petition for one's personal needs; fifth, thanksgiving."²⁰⁹ Many of her students have commented on how formative these Saturday morning prayer times were for themselves and their

²⁰² Vonette Bright recalls that Miss Mears would show up to these 6:00 am prayer meetings already having spent time in personal prayer. Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 115.

²⁰³ Miss Mears might read a page from *My Utmost for His Highest* or read a few verses?? Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 140.

²⁰⁴ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 140.

²⁰⁵ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 218.

²⁰⁶ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 87.

²⁰⁷ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 218.

²⁰⁸ Henrietta was known for her specificity in prayers, such as this one. "Now, Father, Thou hast promised that if we ask anything in Thy name and according to Thy will, we can expect it. First of all, we want to see Thy glory. We long to know the power of the resurrected Christ. We are tired of living humdrum, routine, empty Christian lives. Fill us with abundant life right now! We don't dare trust ourselves. As the deputation team goes up to Fillmore this afternoon, go before them! Speak through them! Give them the abundance of the power of Thy Holy Spirit. And we ask for the class tomorrow morning, for these 300 students who will be there to hear the Word. Give me the wisdom to proclaim Thy truth as it ought to be proclaimed. Now, Father, we believe Thy promises! We claim the victory which Thou has said Thou wilt give to us, that Christ may receive all the glory." Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 218.

²⁰⁹ Henrietta Mears, quoted in Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 98.

ministries.²¹⁰ Bill Bright is representative of those affected by these mornings of prayer, and states that they were “a marvelous way to mentor. She led the time and was an example.”²¹¹ Henrietta did not limit these times of corporate prayer to Saturday mornings. She and the college leaders prayed for half an hour before every meeting,²¹² and Wednesday evenings closed with 20 minutes of prayer.²¹³ At camps, which Henrietta believed were especially important times for students to make decisions, prayer occupied an even more prominent role. In fact, “all faculty were required to meet for 2 hours of prayer each morning before breakfast. There were also spontaneous prayer meetings most days. Ms. Mears was open to changing the program if she believed the Holy Spirit was directing.”²¹⁴

These prayer times not only produced powerful results in her ministry, but also taught students a discipline that she believed would produce powerful results in their ministries throughout their lives. As one student wrote, “perhaps it was the regularity of being on our knees that was the beginning of learning a posture for life.”²¹⁵

²¹⁰ In her Book of Remembrances, comments about how formative these prayer times had been was one of the most common themes of the letters.

²¹¹ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 63.

²¹² Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 126.

²¹³ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 61.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, 77.

²¹⁵ Castellano, Pasquale. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

Chapter Nine

Training by Example: Scripture

In addition to modeling a life of prayer, Henrietta considered it important to model dependence on the Word of God. “Teach the Word clearly and correctly,” she would assert, “to the end that people may come to know Christ as Savior and Lord and to grow spiritually, faithful in every good work.”²¹⁶ Powers writes that

Miss Mears taught us by what she said, did and was. She opened up the Scriptures with rare, direct, and challenging insight. Added to her own spiritual insight, she brought to her Sunday school materials and to her public speaking the very cream of Bible expositors. Everyone sensed that her spiritual power, either in speaking, teaching, or in personal counsel, came from her intimate fellowship with her indwelling Lord, kept fresh morning by morning and moment by moment.²¹⁷

Henrietta read the Bible voraciously, reverently, and with great faith, and believed that in order to be effective in ministry, her leaders would have to do the same.

Modeling a Love of Scripture

Henrietta’s Scofield Reference Bible is kept in the Gospel Light Archives. Its condition speaks volumes about her love of Scripture. Many if not most pages carry hand-written notes and insights gleaned from her devotional time. Some pages from her favorite books, such as the book of Romans, are tenuously held together by multiple pieces of clear tape.²¹⁸ Henrietta’s love for the Lord led to a love for His word. When scripture was being read, Henrietta would lean back in her red leather chair with an

²¹⁶ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 30.

²¹⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 164.

²¹⁸ I spent quite a bit of time going through Miss Mear’s Bible at the Gospel Light Archives in Ventura, CA.

expression as intense as her concentration. With closed eyes and furrowed brow, Henrietta would make small comments on what was being read—"Isn't that tremendous!" or "Now that's what we need to learn!"—or emit her own unique grunt of affirmation.²¹⁹

Scripture as the Textbook for Christian Education

Not only did Henrietta rely heavily on the Bible in her personal devotional life, she also viewed it as the primary textbook to be used in Christian education. Because the Bible was the sole source of information regarding the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Henrietta believed it was also the sole source of information regarding faith, salvation, and the destiny of humankind²²⁰ and therefore the primary vessel for communicating the Christian message. Moreover, she saw a direct correlation between upholding Scripture and the success of a church program, believing "that when the Word of God is being taught in this Sunday School, we immediately have the blessings of God."²²¹ Henrietta stated that

one of the reasons I love to study the Bible, and do study it, and want to see it presented in our Sunday School is because it is the one book that God has promised to bless. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."²²² (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Thus, Henrietta made Scripture the main thrust of her teaching. No matter what other important issues might need to be discussed, Henrietta insisted on the Bible being the

²¹⁹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 220.

²²⁰ Henrietta Mears, "Why We Teach the Bible", date unknown.

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² Mears, "Why We Teach the Bible".

subject of all teaching on Sunday mornings.²²³ There was no substitute for God's Word.

Additionally, Teacher believed that Scripture not only explained *what* to teach, but *how* to teach. The Bible is, in her words, the "text and the sum of the message, also as the source of the principles by which successful Christian education must be carried on."²²⁴

The Need for Quality Biblical Teaching

Because she believed that teaching the Bible led to giving "boys and girls and men and women a foundation for growing and maturing and producing Christian character," Henrietta was profoundly disturbed that it seemed to be "the most poorly taught book in the world."²²⁵ She was particularly upset by the account of an intelligent young man with a Phi Beta Kappa key and a lifetime of Sunday School under his belt who told her that if he had to take a test on Scripture, he would fail miserably.²²⁶ Henrietta came to the conclusion that Sunday School materials failed to engage students and help them retain what they had learned about the Bible. Instead, it often made Scripture seem boring, repetitive, and disjointed.²²⁷ So, she resolved to do something about this problem.

Because of her belief in the importance of knowing Scripture, Henrietta developed several methods to make the Bible more accessible to others. First, she created her own Sunday School materials designed to communicate the Word creatively, chronologically, attractively, and in an age-appropriate manner.²²⁸ Second, she gave

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 100.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, 133.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 35.

²²⁸ The incredible success of these materials necessitated the founding of the Gospel Light Publishing company in 1933.

students a framework for understanding the “big picture” of Scripture. She believed that one of the obstacles to understanding the Bible was a failure to see its continuity, and asserted that

we need to see God’s progressive action with men, and how He develops in His revelation to men. When you think that this book was written by 40 authors over a period of 1500 years on every subject under the sun, it seems incredible that there could be any kind of continuity. But you know, if I went and heard a great orchestra and I did not see the leader at all, but that orchestra harmonized and played so beautifully I would know there was a baton somewhere with a leader.²²⁹

Henrietta sought to present the Bible as a comprehensive whole made up of various components, like a temple composed of various rooms.²³⁰ After her death, her teaching notes were made into a book called *What the Bible is All About*. This best-selling book, distributed at Billy Graham Crusades, helped give new converts a comprehensive survey of Scripture.²³¹

Instilling a love for God’s Word in her Leaders

Henrietta was remarkably effective in instilling a personal love of scripture in her leaders. She painted the Bible as a book that not only explained God’s plans for the ages, but also as a book that should speak to them personally. She expressed the desire that they would ascertain “what the relationship between every word of God is to their individual personalities.”²³² Consequently, many of her students reported that Scripture became much more beloved and personal to them. One of her students wrote that as a

²²⁹ Henrietta Mears, “Why We Teach the Bible.”

²³⁰ Miss Mears creatively pointed to Genesis as the door of the temple, the Pentateuch as the corridor with portraits of heroes on each sides, the history books as the library hung with the promises of God, the Psalms and Proverbs as the music and drama room, the Prophetic books as the observatory, the four gospels as the audience room, the Acts and Epistles as the Athletic field, and the book of Revelation as the Veranda. “Why We Teach the Bible”.

²³¹ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 38.

²³² Henrietta Mears. “Sunday School is Big Business.”

result of her biblical teaching, “The Bible came alive to me in a new way. The Christian Faith suddenly became relevant to my life at college, and to the age in which I lived.”²³³ Another stated that she had “really made me love the Word of God,”²³⁴ a statement about which Henrietta remarked: “I don’t think I’ve had anything ever said to me that really warmed my heart more than that.”²³⁵ Henrietta believed that the love of Scripture was a key source of power for her young leaders’ ministries:

If I could only make you fall in love with the word, your whole life would be transformed, your problems would be answered, life would be entirely different. And this year, your departments would have success beyond anything you could possibly imagine, because the Word of God is sharp and powerful—sharper than any two-edged sword. Oh how the Word of God heals, it blesses, it edifies, it lifts us up, it gives us hope.²³⁶

Thus, when she sent her leaders off to seminary, she reminded them of Acts 20:32, which reads, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

Teacher believed it was paramount for her leaders to have a high view of the authority of scripture. Henrietta believed in and taught the inerrancy of Scripture, and believed that “God’s Word must be our only infallible guide. In keeping it there is great reward. To reject His Word is to be rejected.”²³⁷ As a former chemistry teacher, Henrietta compared the Bible to the laws of Chemistry. She knew that the laws of Chemistry always hold true. If there is a problem recreating an experiment, the error

²³³ Gaut, Lloyd. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

²³⁴ A comment made by Dale Bruner, related in Henrietta Mears’ Speech “Why We Teach the Bible”

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ Henrietta Mears, quoted in Nelson, “*She Wrote Things Worth Reading*,” 9.

does not lie with the laws of Chemistry, it lies with the person doing the experiment. Likewise, if there appears to be a problem with the laws and promises in Scripture, the fault does not lie with the Bible, but with the understanding or practice of the reader.²³⁸

As a young pastor, Billy Graham struggled with his view of Scripture. After reading several liberal theologians who denounced the inspiration and authority of the Bible, he experienced a crisis in faith.²³⁹ He believed that if he could not trust the Bible, his ministry was over.²⁴⁰ Distraught, he sought the counsel of Henrietta Mears at the Forest Home campground. Her wise words helped him assuage his doubts and regain his belief in Scripture as God's word.²⁴¹ This watershed experience empowered him as he went on to preach the famous Los Angeles crusade, which launched his ministry. Miss Mears saw a direct correlation between a person's trust in Scripture and their effectiveness in ministry, stating that, "while the blood of the Lamb makes us safe, our trust in God's Word makes us sure."²⁴² Graham also recognized this connection and later stated that, "aside from his own mother, the most important influence in his life was Dr. Henrietta Mears."²⁴³

Teaching Her Leaders to Read Scripture

Henrietta desired for all her young leaders to have a similar confidence in and understanding of Scripture to empower their lives and ministries. She reminded her leaders that there were "two things Joshua had to do to qualify him for his great work: to be strong and of good courage, and to make the Book of Law his continued study."²⁴⁴

²³⁸ Haskin, "The Fabulous Miss Mears," 47.

²³⁹ *ibid.*

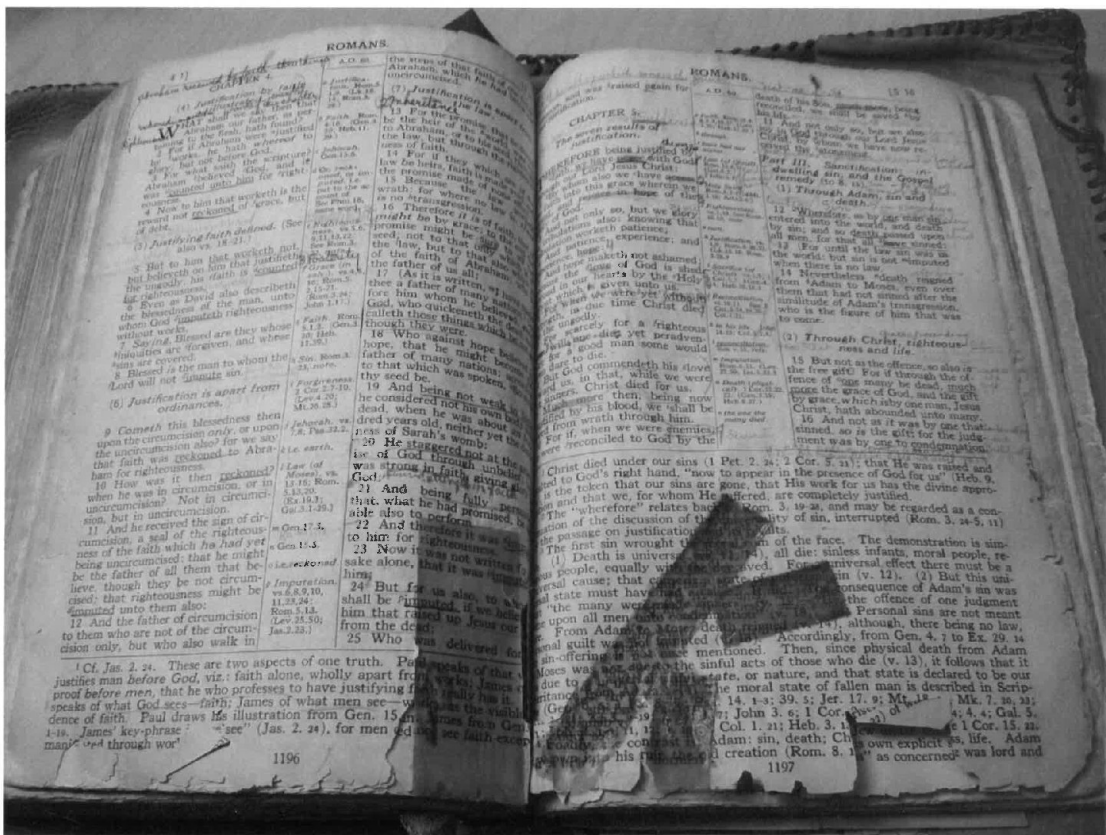
²⁴⁰ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 10.

²⁴¹ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 80.

²⁴² Nelson, "She Wrote Things Worth Reading," 7.

²⁴³ Murray, Charles. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

²⁴⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 100.



Henrietta's Scofield Reference Bible, displaying her favorite book of the Bible, Paul's Epistle to the Romans.



Henrietta Mears and Billy Graham

Henrietta gave extensive practical advice on how scripture should be used in one's ministry. For example, she expected her Sunday School Teachers to use a Bible Mastery Plan when preparing their lessons.

On Sunday, they are to name the chapter, determine who wrote it, when it was written, and why it was written; on Monday they are to memorize key and favorite verses from the chapter; on Tuesday, determine the literary character (history, poetry, etc.); on Wednesday, list and visualize the characters and determine where else they appear in the Bible by using research books if necessary; on Thursday, determine the history and geography; on Friday, select five great facts (one concerning Christ); and on Saturday, make a brief outline and give the chapter personal application.²⁴⁵

The Bible Mastery Plan was not the only systematized method of reading scripture that Henrietta taught. During a speech entitled "Why We Teach the Bible," she outlined seven actions that should characterize a leader's study of Scripture. She asked her audience to read the Bible all the way through *regularly*. This enables a person to understand the full breadth of Scripture. They are to read it *rationaly*, practicing the discipline of loving the Lord with their mind. They are to read it *rapidly*, choosing to occasionally read short books in one sitting to get a better sense of the context. They are to read it *reflectively*, sitting with a text until they get all the meaning from it. They are to read it *repeatedly*, reading a chapter again and again until "it is their own." They are to read it *rejoicingly*, knowing that it gives them "the title deed of [their] inheritance." Finally, they are to read it *reverently*, recognizing that this is God's sovereign word to believers.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Obtained from teacher training records kept by Miss Mears. Cox, "Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director," 54.

²⁴⁶ Henrietta Mears, "Why We Teach the Bible."

Chapter Ten

Training by Example: Excellence

Henrietta's devotional habits led to a tangible experience of the reality of God which informed her leadership training. She had clearly and specifically seen God meet her own needs, and likewise made the primary teaching aim of the College Department "to present Christ in a clear, intelligent, and vital manner as the *only answer to their deepest needs*."²⁴⁷ This goal was reflected in the students' response to the College Department: "How did the class grow to 666 members? By sensationalism and obvious Hollywood attractions? No. Because of earnest prayer, solid theology, and because the college people found *answers to their life problems*; because there was love, and warmth, and enthusiasm; they returned again and again because, 'It was good for us to be there.'"²⁴⁸

Henrietta believed that her own connection with the Lord was essential to making a compelling argument that Christ could be real in the lives of her students. Her experience of Christ along with her biblical knowledge augmented the authority with which she taught.²⁴⁹ One of her former students stated that "Her secret is that she does not teach with head-knowledge only; she teaches with heart-knowledge, and she must experience the truth first, completely, wholly, wonderingly, and then she is so alive with her message that it gushes forth in streams of living water."²⁵⁰

Henrietta's compelling experience of the power of God and His ability and

²⁴⁷ Cox, "Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director," 43-44. Emphasis mine.

²⁴⁸ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 139. Emphasis mine.

²⁴⁹ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 15.

²⁵⁰ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 62.

willingness to work in her life engendered a response of gratitude and action. Brotherton tells us that

her belief system pushed far beyond despair and contained something much more powerful than optimism. She had a huge faith. She believed that God is a God of action, of strength, of results, of change. Victory for her meant completely trusting God at His word and then rolling up her sleeves and working hard—no matter what happened in life. “Nothing less than our best for Christ,” she wrote, “and nothing more than God’s complete adequacy for our inadequacy.”²⁵¹

Because she had seen God work in very tangible ways in her own life, she had no reason to believe that He wouldn’t work in powerful ways through other believers as well. One of Henrietta’s students wrote that “We did not dare ask for anything less than ‘great things’ – we did not dare be content to think that small things would be accomplished – we had a great God who wanted to do great things through His workmen. The Lord met with us in a singular way, and He used you to make His presence very precious real.”²⁵²

Excellence as the Appropriate Response to Christ

Henrietta believed that because she worked for the omnipotent King of the universe, her work should be of the very finest quality, because “excellence honors Christ.”²⁵³ If the goal of her college program was to present Christ, then she believed the standards of the program should be commensurate with the greatness of God.²⁵⁴ This quest for excellence permeated every aspect of her life. Henrietta stated that, “There is no magic in small plans. When I consider my ministry, I think of the world. Anything

²⁵¹ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 32.

²⁵² Garner, Mr. & Mrs. Harold. Letter to Henrietta Mears.

²⁵³ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 54.

²⁵⁴ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 164.

less than that would not be worthy of Christ nor of His will for my life.”²⁵⁵ Thus, Henrietta modeled excellence to her leaders and expected excellence from her leaders.

Modeling Excellence

Henrietta strove for excellence in every area of her life, with phenomenal results. Many considered her pursuit of excellence to be her dominant trait.²⁵⁶ For example, Henrietta was known for being an incredibly dynamic and powerful speaker. One student writes about his first experience hearing Teacher speak: “My first Sunday there [at the FPC Hollywood college department] was a thrill, and I had never in my life heard such a wonderful, dynamic, and inspirational speaker as Miss Mears.”²⁵⁷ Although she was naturally gifted as a speaker, Henrietta’s excellence in speaking was the result of hard work. In fact, it was not unheard of for her to spend up to 20 hours in Bible Study and preparation for a 30-minute talk.²⁵⁸ This demonstrated her belief that “Three things are critical to teaching well. The first is preparation, the second is preparation and the third is preparation.”²⁵⁹

Quality over Quantity

Many people asked her the secret to building a Sunday School program, since her own program had grown from 425 to 4200 in 2.5 years. However, Henrietta never tried to achieve numerical growth: she simply tried to be excellent in all she did. Henrietta valued quality much more than quantity, but believed that the two were closely tied. She once gave the example of Knott’s Berry Farm, which was a very popular place to visit despite its hidden location:

²⁵⁵ Doan, *431 Quotes from the Notes of Henrietta C. Mears*, 38.

²⁵⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 168.

²⁵⁷ Ennis, Elvira and Elwood. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

²⁵⁸ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 130.

²⁵⁹ Mears. “Sunday School is Big Business”.

Because everything was so excellent, people came from miles around. That was a lesson to me: I knew that it did not matter where our church was located; if we had something good, people would come across the country to get it. If the product is good, the people will come. From the first moment my feet entered the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, I never tried to build a bigger Sunday School. My only concern was quality. Size came as a result. Be sure the core of your work is good, or as numbers increase it will collapse.²⁶⁰

Spiritual over Secular

Henrietta was particularly concerned that the activities, programs, and teaching in the church be comparable if not superior to that of the outside world. It did not seem appropriate to her that Christians with minimal training would put minimal effort into a minimal amount of programs and then expect God to bless them greatly. Roe tells us that “she lamented the prevailing attitude in Sunday School generally that God can use anything—or anyone, whether trained or not. Perhaps He can, but should He have to? Henrietta thought not.”²⁶¹ Henrietta believed that our actions for the Lord were a telling reflection of one’s belief in His power, and that shoddy programs were a poor witness to the community. Therefore she desired excellence in all aspects of ministry, even for those who were very young.²⁶² Rather than simply viewing young people’s programs as a sort of spiritualized babysitting, she believed that, “we must change our standards. Everything we offer youth must be excellent. Their association with the gospel must be of the very finest in every way.”²⁶³ Because of her commitment to excellence, many

²⁶⁰ Baldwin, *Henrietta Mears and How She Did It*, 295.

²⁶¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 120.

²⁶² Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 36.

²⁶³ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 119.

young people actually preferred church programs²⁶⁴ to secular programs.²⁶⁵ In fact, one college student wrote that he “would rather bring my fraternity brothers to parties and functions at the college department than those on the ‘row’. They are always the greatest.”²⁶⁶

Henrietta was particularly disturbed that the standards of Sunday School teaching were so much lower than those experienced by children in the public school system, and lamented

how seldom the SS teacher is asked for his credentials! A public school teacher is not questioned as to whether he will teach but rather, can he teach. Our request in securing SS teachers is invariably, “Will you take a class?” And good-natured men and women, much against their wills, answer, “I will keep the class going until you can find someone else.” If a math teacher is absent, can you imagine the principal going out in the neighborhood, ringing doorbells and asking a housewife, “Will you come over and take a class in mathematics because the regular teacher is sick?” Absurd! He notifies the superintendent’s office of his need, and a trained person comes.²⁶⁷

In stark contrast to the bright new buildings, well-trained teachers, and closely graded textbooks that students experienced in the public schools, Sunday School often afforded dingy rooms, poorly trained teachers, and Sunday School lessons with titles like “Amos Denounces Self-Indulgence.”²⁶⁸ No wonder young people knew so little about the Bible! Henrietta sought to remedy this discrepancy in quality by recruiting and training the

²⁶⁴ Henrietta’s standard of excellence led to huge growth in the college department because so many students invited their friends to partake in these superior programs. Ennis writes that “my memories go back to UCLA in 1935 where I met Bill Dunlap, who ‘talked up’ the college department so that I was impelled to go see this wonderful church.”

²⁶⁵ Baldwin, *Henrietta Mears and How She Did It*, 88.

²⁶⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 112.

²⁶⁷ Doan, *431 Quotes from the Notes of Henrietta C. Mears*, 43.

²⁶⁸ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 24.

finest teachers available,²⁶⁹ upgrading the facilities,²⁷⁰ and creating her own creative, age-graded Sunday School material.²⁷¹

Expected Excellence from Others

Henrietta fully expected her leaders-in-training to demonstrate excellence in their endeavors, both as an appropriate response to Christ and as a foundation for effective ministry. Her insistence on excellence tended to attract leaders with similarly high standards who strove to give their best for the glory of God.²⁷² One student wrote, “One of the most significant pieces of advice which I particularly remember you giving pertained to our “doing” of things for Christ and in His name. You repeatedly referred to the giving of our best for Christ.”²⁷³ Henrietta expected their best, and would accept no less. Poorly executed tasks could have disastrous effects on a ministry.²⁷⁴ In a looseleaf notebook, Henrietta recorded her fears of having mediocre ministries:

The average is the worst enemy of the best. One is fairly easy; the latter is hard. Most Sunday School leaders have a short span of endurance. The sad fact is that one poor session in Sunday School, in choir, or in other activities offsets all the good programs you have worked so hard to obtain. If a person comes once and is not pleased, he will say, “Oh, I went to that Sunday School. I don’t like it.” You may reply “When was that? We have a fine class. You must have been there that Sunday the teacher didn’t come (or one of a dozen other reasons). Come on back.” “No, I didn’t like it.” He only remembers the one bad time.”²⁷⁵

²⁶⁹ Henrietta’s Sunday School teachers were often professional teachers as well.

²⁷⁰ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 119.

²⁷¹ The Sunday School curriculum she created was so popular that she eventually started publishing it so that other churches would have access to it as well. Although she never intended to start a publishing company, the demand for this high-quality, creative, age-appropriate material necessitated it. So she and a few others founded the Gospel Light Press, the “the first Sunday School publisher to provide age-graded Bible lessons.” Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 98.

²⁷² Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 116.

²⁷³ Wegeman, Nancy Stevens. Letter to Henrietta Mears. 1961.

²⁷⁴ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 44.

²⁷⁵ From records kept by Henrietta Mears.

Handling Failure

Thus, she encouraged students to give to do their best in every task. However, failures are inevitable, particularly with fledgling leaders. When a person or group failed at a task, Henrietta took the time to sit down with them and determine the cause of the failure.²⁷⁶ Together, they would come up with a course of action to help remedy the situation or produce better results next time.²⁷⁷ Rather than feeling defeated by their mistakes, students left encouraged and wiser for their experience. While recognizing that some failures were inevitable, Miss Mears attempted to prevent her students from undertaking a task that could not possibly succeed by helping them to identify when they did not have the time, resources, or gifts required to complete a task.²⁷⁸ After all, she was not gifted in every area, and did not expect others to be either. She joked that

you would never ask me to sing the soprano solo on Sunday morning. It would be criminal. That is not my talent. My job as a trainer of leaders is to spot the potential of a person. What are his talents? What is his potential? It doesn't matter if he is doing anything now or not. I must see where he is capable of going. Then I encourage him along that line.²⁷⁹

Henrietta repeatedly told her leaders that they were key to achieving success, and that a program or department would not outstrip its leaders. Despite the good intentions that drove her demand for excellence, the sheer responsibility of what she asked of them left some students intimidated. As one student said, "We can't all be Luthers in religion, Faradays in science or Gladstones in politics. I feel left out of Miss Mears' vision."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 203.

²⁷⁷ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 55.

²⁷⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 204.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 201.

Henrietta recognized that not everyone was called or gifted to do great things, but still believed that students would achieve their highest potential when pushed to do so.²⁸¹

Excellence in Aesthetics

Henrietta's desire for excellence was not merely limited to the spiritual realm. Henrietta loved beautiful things, and surrounded herself with them whenever possible. In stark contrast to some conservative Christian women of the day who believed fashion was ungodly,²⁸² Henrietta always tried to look her very best. One Sunday, a parishioner scandalized by her make-up told her that she looked like the devil. Henrietta immediately quipped, "Well, you should see me without my make-up on!"²⁸³ Though she was not beautiful,²⁸⁴ Miss Mears was famous for her striking hats and attractive clothing.²⁸⁵ She once expressed her philosophy of dress in this way:

You will attract attention to yourself if you are not abreast of the fashion of the times. If you are properly dressed according to the standard of the group you are in, you can forget yourself. If you are over-dressed, you will feel conspicuous. Be sure every detail is right and then forget your appearance. I think Sunday clothes are a good idea. Why not look your best when you go to church on Sunday? Honoring the Lord should be the greatest occasion of the week.²⁸⁶

Henrietta was always the pinnacle of fashion,²⁸⁷ but not because she wished to draw

²⁸¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 201.

²⁸² Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 125.

²⁸³ Author's interview with Bill Grieg III, March 2008.

²⁸⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 184.

²⁸⁵ Cox, "Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director", 50.

²⁸⁶ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 184.

²⁸⁷ Many of her students seemed enamored with her style of dress. David Cowie recounts the first time he saw Miss Mears in this way: "Not only do I remember the pink silk dress and the pink picture hat with white roses, but I remember her lesson practically verbatim. We had never seen such a vision of worldly beauty giving forth such spiritual truth." (letter from David Cowie to Henrietta Mears). In a letter written to her when she was 71 years of age, another student quips that "her exuberant youth, evidenced by equally exuberant habits of dress, has no way been a handicap... and certainly, may yet be tempered by the influence of some mature male." (letter from John Barnhard to Henrietta Mears) On several occasions,

Henrietta and Margaret Mears



The Mears sisters were known for their beautiful dresses, stoles, and hats.

attention to herself. Instead, this was one more way of reflecting the excellence and attractiveness of Christ: “Her whole motive was to serve the Lord, for to paraphrase Paul: ‘Whether you wear a hat with plumes or flowers, wear it unto the Lord.’ And Miss Mears wore hers unto the Lord.”²⁸⁸

Excellent Facilities

Likewise, she believed that aesthetically pleasing facilities²⁸⁹ create an attractive environment that is conducive to learning.²⁹⁰ After all, “children are not attracted to a run-down church.”²⁹¹ So Henrietta did everything she could to make the church facilities beautiful,²⁹² incorporating flowers, music, and a fresh coat of paint into their church buildings.²⁹³ In fact, on the first church-wide work day designated to achieve these goals, she and the pastor personally painted the women’s restrooms, demonstrating to her volunteers that she was willing to get her hands dirty to accomplish her goals.²⁹⁴ Henrietta believed that an excellence in aesthetics created an atmosphere where many would be given “an opportunity to hear the claims of Christ in many different settings.”²⁹⁵

men and women have parodied Miss Mears, and there are a number of highly comical pictures of both women and men dressed up like Miss Mears, wearing elaborate dresses, stoles, and hats.

²⁸⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 185.

²⁸⁹ Henrietta also had a beautifully decorated house, which was often used in many of her ministries, including a bible study for Hollywood actors and actresses. Additionally, several recount that Miss Mears hosted their wedding receptions. (Letter from Bob Munger to Henrietta Mears, letter from Edie Munger to Henrietta Mears, letter from Mary and Martin Long to Henrietta Mears)

²⁹⁰ Hervey states that, “I was one of the many children in the neighborhood around First Presbyterian that came because the Sunday School program was attractive to children.”

²⁹¹ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 33.

²⁹² One room in particular is worth of note: “The sixth graders meet in one of the most beautiful rooms of the church known as the Crossley Room, named in honor of a devoted family who made dolls for every famous Bible character and little props to help make the Bible stories come alive. These dolls and props are used on a revolving stage, complete with lighting and special effects, as the stories are told. The results are outstanding.” Cox, “Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director”, 36.

²⁹³ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 67.

²⁹⁴ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 33.

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 55.

Henrietta developed in her leaders an appreciation for presenting themselves positively to the world around them. She involved all the volunteers that she could in the task of creating an excellent environment within the church. Further, she relied on those in the Christian Education department to help her create a wonderful sense of pageantry for the annual Sunday School graduation ceremony, which she hoped would “foster a sense of accomplishment, encouraging the children to faithfulness and further study of the Word of God.”²⁹⁶ Additionally, she took it upon herself to make sure that the young men from her college department who went on to seminary were representing themselves well by buying them their first “preacher’s suits”²⁹⁷ and overcoats.²⁹⁸ She took this responsibility so seriously that her secretary kept the boys’ measurements on file so that she could take advantage of annual department store sales.²⁹⁹ One student who was a recipient of her generosity excitedly told her that he had “repaid his debt” by buying another young seminarian his first “preacher suit.”³⁰⁰ Henrietta’s legacy of presenting herself as attractive for the glory of the Lord lived on.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 43.

²⁹⁷ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*.

²⁹⁸ Glenn Zachary fondly recounts this in a letter to Henrietta: “Do you remember taking a couple of us to the store and buying each of us a suit and an overcoat? I never did find out whether you did this so that we would not freeze to death back at Princeton or whether it was so we wouldn’t disgrace the church by our worn wardrobes.”

²⁹⁹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*.

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*

Chapter Eleven

Training through Experience: College Department

In addition to training by example, Henrietta believed that young leaders could be developed by being allowed to lead in supervised settings. The primary vehicle for her leadership development was the College Department, where she served as teacher during her entire ministry at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. The College Department set the tone for the rest of the Christian Education program.³⁰¹ Not only did many go on to serve as leaders elsewhere at FPC Hollywood,³⁰² over 400 young people from the college department went on to full-time ministry.³⁰³ Powers writes,

Miss Mears considers the 28 years³⁰⁴ of teaching the College Department the strongest link in the chain of her leadership. She has had the greatest personal influence on those who will emerge to take positions of leadership, working closely with her. It has been a ground for experimentation, and a vehicle for demonstrating principles.³⁰⁵

Because “leadership training was the main thrust of the College Department,”³⁰⁶

Henrietta created an expansive cabinet of leaders who were intimately involved in the

³⁰¹ Although the College Department was her main venue for developing young leaders, the entire Christian Education department was considered vital for discipleship and training potential leaders. Records from the Christian Education Department indicate that in the year 1959,

“4,121 attended special conference courses. (summer camps)

125,000 have attended SS hour and extended sessions on Sunday.

35,000 have attended Sunday evening Fellowship hours, including High School, College, and Ambassador groups.

9,950 have attended sings for the various groups.

3,000 have attended monthly Teachers and Officers meetings.

This makes a grand total of 177,071 lives for whom the church provided training through their many activities in 1959.” Cox, “Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director.” 16.

³⁰² Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 141.

³⁰³ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*.

³⁰⁴ This statement was written in 1957, 6 years before her death in 1963. Miss Mears continued teaching the College Department for the rest of her life.

³⁰⁵ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 141-142.

³⁰⁶ Madden, “Henrietta Mears”, 49.



Ethel May Baldwin, Esther Ellinghusen, Stanley Engle, and Henrietta Mears stand in front of the first storefront location of the Gospel Light Press on Vine St. in 1936. Gospel Light Press celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2008.



Henrietta frequently hosted the college department at her beautifully appointed Hollywood home.

planning and execution of all aspects of college ministry.³⁰⁷ At any given time there were as many as 75 students working as leaders in the College Department, but with a class numbering over 600, many leaders were needed to oversee the numerous programs.³⁰⁸ Moreover, involving so many students in the cabinet accomplished another, more important purpose: “more students on the cabinet meant more people involved in the activities and therefore, more leaders being trained.”³⁰⁹

Strategically Delegating Leadership

Miss Mears was a great believer in delegating leadership for several reasons: first, the more people involved in leading a program, the more time and creativity that can be poured in the program. Recognizing that various people had different talents and perspectives, Henrietta believed that each person brought his or her own unique and valuable perspective, creativity, and initiative.³¹⁰ Moreover, “many hands make light work.” Second, greater involvement in planning a project means more widespread interest in a project. Most importantly, many students leading a project mean that many students are receiving leadership training and experience.³¹¹ When delegating leadership, Henrietta was also teaching young leaders that they should also delegate leadership.

She has always trained her leaders to distribute themselves by distributing leadership and to guide the others as they carry out the plans and procedures. This is “extending leadership through others.” She warns her leaders not to spread themselves too thin in their service. She recently cautioned the president of the college class that he simply could not be concerned with making personal contacts with 600 people; he would wear himself out and nothing would be accomplished. He must work through his leaders in the

³⁰⁷ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 205.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*

³¹⁰ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 162.

³¹¹ *ibid.*, 162.

department, pass on the responsibility, inspire them with the right spirit so they in turn can reach the others.^{312,313}

Held Leaders Accountable

When Teacher assigned a leader a responsibility, she expected him or her to carry it out. David Cowie, one of her college students who went on to pastor a large church in Seattle, vocalized that “She puts you on your mettle to produce. You had to do it and she wanted you to be able to do it, to feel the sole responsibility, and not to have any feeling that she would do it for you.”³¹⁴ Henrietta believed that in order for young leaders to get the full experience of leadership, they must feel that the task utterly depended upon them.

Henrietta was of the opinion that

if you assign responsibility to others, then expect them to carry on that responsibility. Don’t let them get by without doing it. If you have been assigned a responsibility and you accept that responsibility, then give others the confidence that you have accepted it completely, and that you will follow through and do it to the fullest extent of your ability.³¹⁵

Although she handed over primary responsibility for accomplishing a task to a leader and expected “leaders to develop their own initiative, resources, plans, and materials,”³¹⁶ she did not entirely leave them to their own devices. She was always close by, aware of what was transpiring, offering counsel and resources as appropriate.³¹⁷

Further, Henrietta expected her leaders to learn to train other leaders. Every committee leader was expected to rely on his committee members. Not only would this enable more work to be accomplished, but it also served the purpose of training a new

³¹² Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 162.

³¹³ Additionally, her policy of delegating leadership helped her to create a self-sustaining ministry that would allow her to take regular sabbaticals. Madden, “Henrietta Mears,” 90.

³¹⁴ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 85.

³¹⁵ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 162.

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, 160.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, 162.

batch of leaders. At least once or twice a year, a committee leader was expected to let his committee assume complete responsibility for a program or task.³¹⁸ Additionally, leaders in her college department were expected to help identify and train their replacements.³¹⁹ Not only did this ensure a continual supply of leadership in the transient college department, but it also trained leaders to reproduce themselves. If Henrietta had trained an outstanding group of leaders who failed to reproduce themselves, then the influence would only last one generation. But if she could produce leaders who would go on to produce more leaders, then her influence would increase exponentially. It is perhaps because she produced so many influential leaders who created even more influential leaders that she has been referred to as the Grandmother of modern Evangelicalism.³²⁰ Those under her influence, along with their protégés, changed the face of Evangelical Christianity in 20th century America.

³¹⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 166.

³¹⁹ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 53.

³²⁰ Zoba, "The Grandmother of Us All," 44.

Chapter Twelve

Training through Experience: Camping Ministries

Another primary locus of leadership development was Teacher's camping ministry, which took place primarily at Forest Home, a beautiful campground that she had helped the church acquire.³²¹ Miss Mears believed that camping was an integral part of any ministry because, in her own words, "a week at a good camp can often accomplish spiritually in a student's life what it takes years to do otherwise."³²² Henrietta believed that once young people were away from all the distractions of the world, they would have an opportunity to hear from God and make decisions for the Lord.³²³ The camping program became an influential training ground for the young people of her church³²⁴ and other churches as well. In fact, in 1956 alone, there were over 26,000 participants in the conferences at Forest Home.³²⁵

Called to Decision

One of the primary purposes of the camps was to call young people to decisions,³²⁶ whether decisions to become a Christian or decisions to full-time Christian service. Henrietta believed that decisions should be solidified and remembered. One technique for formalizing decisions was the "Book of Remembrance."³²⁷

After making a public profession of Christ in Victory Circle, each young person moved to a small table nearby where Teacher presided over a Book of Remembrance. Believing that writing one's name down after making a

³²¹ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*.

³²² Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 104.

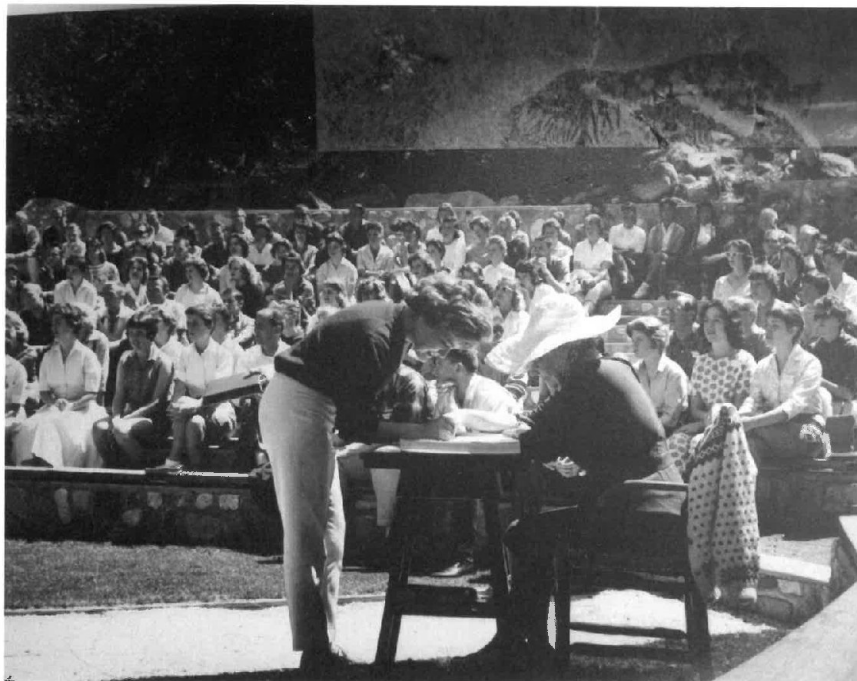
³²³ *ibid.*, 112.

³²⁴ Cox, "Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director," 11.

³²⁵ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 31.

³²⁶ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 112.

³²⁷ Clinton, "Focused Lives," 363.



Signing the Book of Remembrances

public decision helped to crystallize it in the mind, Henrietta Mears would hand the individual a pen with an invitation to sign the book, quietly encouraging him or her with a gentle, "God bless you." This scene was repeated many, many times in Teacher's lifetime.³²⁸

Henrietta believed that commitments were more irrevocable when they were written down. During a speech on leadership, she exhorted her hearers to record their decisions: "What has God told you to do tonight? Would you go home tonight and write down some decisions? Don't write down 10 decisions. Right down one decision that you will do and ask God to give you courage to fulfill that condition."³²⁹

Similarly, at a conference in 1947,³³⁰ Henrietta placed a large map on the wall to be signed by those who were committing to missionary work. Years later, Miss Mears recounted the experience: "I wish I could tonight just tell you the lists of their names and where they are tonight all over the world – to India, and Afghanistan, and the Congo, and one of the young men that was there said to me 'You know that there were about 200 of us that had made decisions and there are about 50 of us already on the foreign seas, and right in this room tonight there are 7.'" It is difficult to measure the impact of these missionaries on the world. The person whom she referred to as going to Afghanistan was J. Christy Wilson, who would later become a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.³³¹ Another student recalled the impact of this experience in determining his life's work: "What am I going to do with my life? In 1947, I wrote my name on the big map on the spot marked 'X' which God had shown us. The many years of your life at

³²⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 251.

³²⁹ Mears, "Leadership."

³³⁰ *ibid.*

³³¹ Madden, "Henrietta Mears", 78.

Hollywood have shown all of us that we can ‘reach the world from one spot.’³³²

The Expendables

One of the most powerful moments in her camping ministry came in 1947 after Henrietta returned from a visit to post-WWII Europe. As she witnessed the devastation rampant in the war-torn countries, she came to an increasingly deeper conviction that God desired to use believers to minister around the world to minister to those in such dire conditions.³³³ She expressed her beliefs at a Teacher’s Training meeting at Forest Home: “God is looking for men and women of total commitment. During the war, men of special courage were called upon for difficult assignments; often these volunteers did not return. They were called Expendables. We must be expendables for Christ.”³³⁴ Four young men responded to her challenge and formed the “Fellowship of the Burning Heart”, committing to four disciplines:

1. To pray, study the Bible and read devotional books not less than one hour per day.
 2. To consistently live with Christ-like character.
 3. To seek every opportunity to win the lost to Christ, and to witness at every opportunity.
 4. To be completely sold-out for Christ in every area of life.
- That day—perhaps officially, perhaps unofficially—marked the beginning of what was to become a worldwide revival movement. The original leaders of the movement signed the pledge. As word got out, others were invited to join the Fellowship.³³⁵

The four original members of the Fellowship were Richard Halverson (future chaplain of the U.S. Senate, Louis Evans, Jr. (a future pastor and author), Jack Franck (future minister at Forest Home),³³⁶ and Bill Bright (future founder of Campus Crusade for

³³² Franck, Jack. Letter to Henrietta Mears.

³³³ Clinton, “Focused Lives,” 338.

³³⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 280.

³³⁵ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 120.

³³⁶ Franck, Jack. Letter to Henrietta Mears.

Christ).³³⁷ Bill Bright said of the event, "It was a dramatic, marvelous experience. We knew the living God had come to take control. While we were all carried away with the sense of the holy presence of our God, our minds were racing with creative ideas."³³⁸

The young men helped plan a national "College Briefing Conference." This powerful conference led to a nationwide revival among college students.³³⁹ Moreover, the College Briefing Conferences became annual events, and it was during one of these conferences that Billy Graham experienced his turning point in ministry.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 280.

³³⁸ Brotherton, *Teacher: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 119.

³³⁹ *ibid.*, 124.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.*

Chapter 13

Training through Experience: Vocational Training Programs

Henrietta was especially devoted to making sure that those going into the pastorate had ample opportunity to have a hands-on learning experience in ministry. Her two primary training grounds for aspiring ministers were the Timothy Club and the Summer Seminarian program.

The Timothy Club

The Timothy Club consisted of those interested in vocational Christian ministry, including “ministry, missions, Christian education and even church administration.”³⁴¹ Once a month, this large group of pre-seminarians would meet with the pastor of FPC Hollywood or another denominational leader. When Henrietta first organized the group, it was under the leadership of the current pastor, Stuart P. MacClennan. MacClennan was well-known for being a diligent worker and a friend of many in the business community, so his advice could extend past preparing sermons to other practical skills, such as “personal work, building a library, and acquiring a good filing system.”³⁴² All three of the pastors of FPC Hollywood during Henrietta’s ministry (Stuart MacClennan, Louis Evans, and Raymond Lindquist) were very committed to this organization, even taking time to demonstrate first-hand how to prepare a sermon.³⁴³

The Timothy Club utilized more than just the pastor in providing wise training and counsel for the pre-seminarians. A variety of denominational leaders and other speakers graced the meetings, welcoming and addressing the students’ concerns and

³⁴¹ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 211.

³⁴² Cox, “Henrietta Mears as a Christian Education Director,” 11.

³⁴³ *ibid.*

questions.³⁴⁴ Occasionally, select students were even allowed to observe the Session.³⁴⁵

However, students were far more than passive observers of other people's ministries.

Consistent with Henrietta's mantra that young leaders learn from hands-on experiences, members of the Timothy Club participated alongside the pastor in his ministry, such as helping out with the Sunday evening service or accompanying the pastor in making house calls.³⁴⁶ This practical experience and exposure to real-life ministry situations allowed young leaders to gain valuable lessons and perspectives on leadership. In fact, "this early training meant more to many of the youth than did seminary later on, because of their direct involvement in live situations during their younger, more formative years."³⁴⁷

Summer Internships for Seminarians

Henrietta's training for those going into ministry did not end when they left for seminary. Since she believed that leadership skills are acquired by leading, it would only make sense that seminarians practice their newly acquired knowledge and skills in a practical setting. By giving returning seminarians a summer internship, she gave them an opportunity to apply their skills and enhance their understanding of the concepts taught in their classes.

Each year, the five or six interns committed to a rigorous schedule that included elements of learning and practice. The seminarians were required to devote several hours every day to study. As yet another way that Henrietta delegated leadership, older seminarians led training classes for younger seminarians in a broad spectrum of areas

³⁴⁴ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 211.

³⁴⁵ Roe defines "Session" as "a Presbyterian term for the body of ruling and teaching elders who govern a church" Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 211.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*

including theology, Bible study, Christian education, evangelism and camping ministries.³⁴⁸ However, study and training courses were augmented by practical application. The interns were given real responsibilities commensurate with their abilities. Each summer the seminarians filled the Christian Education office with bustling activity that benefited both themselves and the church. The program was such a success, and the position of summer seminarian so desirable, that soon pastors from other churches began calling Henrietta to see if their seminarians could also spend a summer interning at First Presbyterian Church, Hollywood.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 211.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 212.



Henrietta Mears, age 65

Chapter Fourteen

Conclusion

Henrietta Mears trained hundreds of leaders who would eventually lead millions of individuals to the Lord. Powers states that

ever mindful that God had called her to train leaders, Henrietta continually sought out leaders among her young people and trained them, all her energies, ambitions, and abilities dedicated to helping each one achieve his maximum development.³⁵⁰

Henrietta was developed as a leader primarily under the tutelage of her mother. Margaret Mears taught her daughter to value prayer and scripture and allowed her to develop her leadership skills through serving in increasingly substantial leadership roles. Henrietta felt that God had called her to raise up leaders in the church, and eventually became the Director of Christian Education at Hollywood Presbyterian Church. (Chapters 1, 2)

Henrietta believed that God could call any person to be a leader. However, she maintained that effective leaders must be Godly, humble, and capable, willing to pay the price of leadership by putting hard work into all of their endeavors. Henrietta developed all kinds of leaders: male and female, lay and clergy. However, she particularly focused on developing young men for vocational Christian service. (Chapters 3-6)

Henrietta trained leaders in two primary ways: by her example, and through allowing them to experience leadership. Like her mother, Henrietta effectively modeled the disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading, and personal excellence. Henrietta also created specialized programs that allowed students to test their wings in leadership,

³⁵⁰ Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story*, 197.

including the College Department Executive Board, the camping ministry, the Timothy Club, and the Summer Seminarian Program. (Chapters 7-13)

Throughout her life and ministry, Henrietta sought to reproduce leaders who would reproduce leaders in order to reach the world for Christ. In her own words, Henrietta Mears says,

God's redemptive purpose must be made known. He has entrusted it to men and women. Our chief means of carrying it is through teaching. Our God given commission calls for teaching at its best. Christ's commission must be obeyed. "Go ye into all the world" – make disciples by teaching – then make disciples teachers so they can go out in ever enlarging circles.³⁵¹

³⁵¹ Records kept by Miss Mears.

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